

# interzone



AUGUST 2000

NUMBER 158

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**Keith Brooke**

**Elizabeth Counihan**

**Cory Doctorow**

**John Meaney**



**plus interviews with John Meaney and Brian Stableford**



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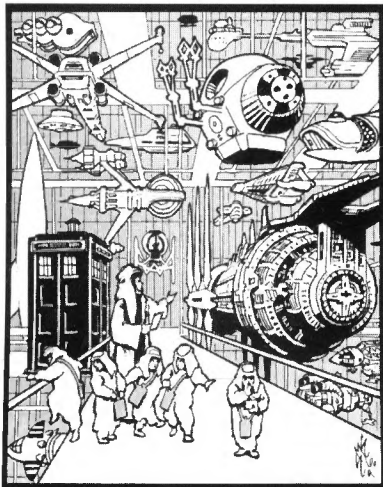
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# interzone

science fiction & fantasy

AUGUST 2000

Number 158

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## Novel shortage

Dear Editors:

In the course of an otherwise perfectly reasonable book review by Chris Gilmore in your May issue, I was brought up short by Gilmore's offhand reference to the book's "resemblance to Robert E. Howard's Conan novels."

Howard, of course, wrote only one Conan novel (serialized in *Weird Tales* as "The Hour of the Dragon" and published in book form as *Conan the Conqueror*). He published a couple of dozen shorter pieces about Conan (short stories and novelettes), and these were originally collected into four volumes. (A few unsold stories were published later and a few fragments completed by other hands; again, none of these are novels.)

I suspect Gilmore knows this, and I would not ordinarily bother to send a letter quibbling about the choice of a single word, were this not only the most recent of a number of instances I've noticed lately in which short-story collections were casually described as novels, not only by publishers (who have long felt that they have something to gain by the practice), but now by readers, critics, bookdealers, and even sometimes my fellow librarians. Simply put, "novel" now seems to have acquired the broader meaning of "any book of fiction."

I realize the short story has been declared endangered or near-dead for decades, but there are still a few of us so unfashionable as to prefer story cycles and/or random story collections to novels; for the sake of the continued health of magazines like *Interzone*, which are essentially based on short stories, I'm sure you hope this continues to be the case. Letting the term "novel" become a default synonym for "fiction" won't help matters.

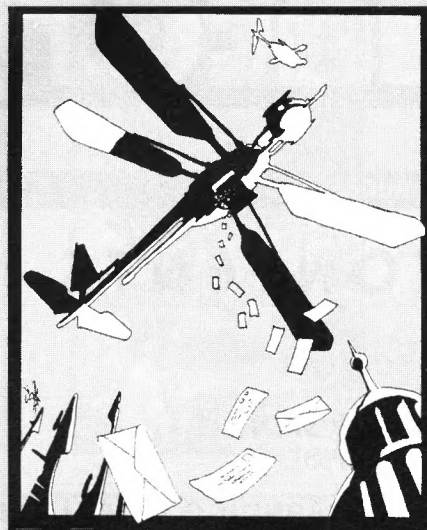
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## East is Best

Dear Editors:

I loved Nick Lowe's review of the *Pokemon* movies! (IZ 156.) "Wonkily non-western humour," "quintessential Far-East bonkers": brilliant! (Aficionados of the "completely batty and Japanese" should also have a look at the Nintendo game "Pokemon Stadium" for more treats, including a bizarre sushi-eating contest harangued by mad Japanese voice off-stage.) What is fascinating is the way children's perceptions are changing. When I was small, the Far East was a colourful backward place. To my eleven-year-old son, it is



## INTERACTION

somewhere cool, high-tech and modern. People used to bemoan the Westernization of the world. Perhaps we are now beginning to see the Easternization of the West. One day we may even understand that wonky humour!

**Chris Beckett**  
Cambridge

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## Alternate Worlds

Dear Editors:

For sometime there seems to have been a low-level debate about alternative histories. In the last few poll results people have voiced their concerns about them and a desire to see fewer of them in *Interzone*. I have always been on the other side of this argument and have enjoyed the AH stories published in your magazine, especially the "USSA" series by Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne. It is ironic, then, that half of that duo, Byrne and his story "HMS Habakkuk" (IZ 155), has pushed me into the other camp. The story was well-written but it was also pointless. The two elements of the very thin plot (the snorkel and the spy) weren't sf or even alternative but merely historical. Except for the huge ship, the *Habakkuk* itself, the story read like a dull extract from Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon*.

**Martin Wilson**

zctys26@ucl.ac.uk

## Cybernetic Pub

Dear Editors:

I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed Tim Robins's review of my recently released book *A Critical History of Doctor Who on Television* (McFarland) in the May 2000 issue of *Interzone*. I found the critique good-humoured, and my wife and I particularly enjoyed the shtick about the "cybernetic pub" (hic). Perhaps Tim and I need to get together with the people producing the new *Doctor Who* feature film and lobby them for the inclusion of just such an establishment in the TARDIS? It could go where the Zero Room used to be...

Anyway, many thanks to Robins and to *Interzone* for highlighting my work.

**John K. Muir**

(Somewhere in the USA)

## Morals vs. Ethics

Dear Editors:

I've just read the Harlan Ellison interview (IZ 156). For me the most interesting part was the alleged distinction between morals and ethics.

I think Ellison is wrong to make the distinction, which supports only a very rarefied difference, and not the one he identifies. The story he tells about himself and Pam Pia is a moral tale of the purest sort: he made her a moral commitment, which was not legally enforceable; for literary and financial reasons he reneged on that commitment; he subsequently felt the prick of conscience, which reduced his



stature in his own eyes, and detracted from the value of the financial and literary rewards which he had gathered thereby. What has this to do with "ethics" as distinct from morals? Nothing at all, I suggest.

To say that "morals is Latin for ethics, and ethics is Greek for morals," is perhaps to over-simplify, but not by much. In so far as there is a difference, I would say that ethics derive from what one recognizes as seemly in social terms, while morals derive from what one recognizes as seemly in oneself. For instance, in the days when solicitors were not permitted to advertise, a solicitor might support the ban, not because he regarded advertising as an immoral activity, but because he believed that if it were permitted at all, it would be subject to a variant on Gresham's Law. Meretricious or dishonest advertising would come to drive out the more honourable kind, and the dignity of the profession would in due course suffer. His stance would thus be an ethical stance, but not a moral one, and it might well be described as stemming ultimately from long-term self-interest. This, of course, is not to condemn it, as it can be argued that if everyone acts according to sound moral/ethical principles, society at large will benefit, as will all its members.

OK, I've given my example. Now would Mr Ellison like to offer an example where his ethics specify one course of action, but morality offers opposite guidance or none?

**Chris Gilmore**

Dear Editors:

You interview Harlan Ellison, and ask him about his personal ethics. He gives a publishing example of what he considers an unethical act.

And you don't ask him about *Last Dangerous Visions*?

**Andrew Barton**

[AndrewBarton@compuserve.com](mailto:AndrewBarton@compuserve.com)

**Editor:** Interviewers have long since given up asking Mr Ellison about what has become of that much-vaunted anthology he announced to the world in the 1970s. Time to let it rest in peace, perhaps.

## An Underrated Author?

Dear Editors:

Recently, I was idly thinking about the fantastic literature that I have read in the last ten years and I noticed something odd – that my favourite novel from that period seems to have been almost completely ignored and is well on its way to becoming a neglected masterpiece. I don't claim to have any particular talent for spotting master-

pieces but I have been reading sf and fantasy for nearly 40 years now. That is plenty of time to get terribly jaded, so, when something does come along that rings all the bells, blows all the whistles and knocks my socks off, I expect someone else to at least mention it (even if it's just to say that it's crap!).

The novel is *Metropolitan* by Walter Jon Williams (I note that it was published in 1995 – doesn't time fly?). Going back through my files of *Interzone* I note that you don't seem ever to have reviewed it, which is odd as you don't seem to miss much. Perhaps it was reviewed elsewhere but I have never seen such a review.

The first couple of chapters of *Metropolitan* led me to believe that it was going to be a standard dystopia. The setting is a vast, multi-layered, world-spanning city, sealed off from the rest of the universe by some mysterious and unexplained force-field. Because the inhabitants of this fearsome megapolis can't escape, each new phase of civilization is built on top of previous phases. In the accreted layers beneath the World City resides a geomantic energy source called "plasm." Plasm is plainly a form of magic and, hence, this book is fantasy but fantasy handled in a science-fictional way (an inverse of Gene Wolfe's *Book of the New Sun*, which is science fiction with fantasy trappings). Plasm is also the World City's chief source of energy and there is a "Plasm Authority" which regulates its distribution and use.

The novel's protagonist is a young woman called Aiah, a lowly employee of the Plasm Authority, who stumbles upon a new source of plasm and decides to keep it secret and profit from it if she can. In order to exploit her find she forms an alliance with the eponymous Metropolitan (Constantine), a dangerous, charismatic politician and revolutionary. Aiah, quite unashamedly, uses her own sexuality to form this alliance. Much of the tension in the book comes from the fact that the reader can never be sure if Aiah can trust Constantine and what the consequences will be, for her, if his audacious plans fail.

In a recent review of China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (IZ 155), Tom Arden criticizes the author for only portraying the squalid aspects of his fictional city. In contrast, Walter Jon Williams's creation is truly a place where "...extremes of filth and beauty, squalor and splendour, poverty and riches are dramatically mixed." Williams's novel, *Metropolitan*, is not only gritty and convincing but it is also the most remarkable exploration of the uses and abuses of power (political, sexual and geomantic!) that I

have ever read.

The decade of the 1990s saw many fine novels written by the likes of Bear, Robinson, Sterling, Gibson, Baxter, Hamilton, Willis, Vinge and Zindell. I think that *Metropolitan* is up there with the best of them (and is a damn sight shorter and more concise than many of them). I think that it is time that it got the recognition that it deserves, at least in this country.

While I'm on the subject, any chance of an interview with Walter Jon Williams, or, perhaps, even a story?

**David Bishop**

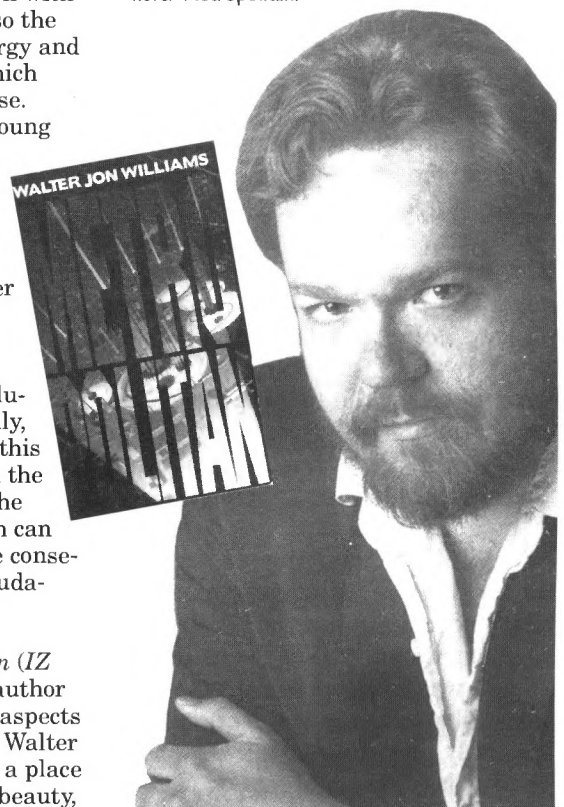
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**Editor:** We agree Walter Jon Williams is a somewhat underrated author, and we apologize for not reviewing his *Metropolitan* five years ago (it slipped through our net somehow; however, we have reviewed quite a few of his other books over the years – see the full reviews index which can be located via our website, [www.sfsite.com/interzone](http://www.sfsite.com/interzone)). An interview in these pages with Walter Jon Williams is looking likely for the near future.

Below: Walter Jon Williams with, inset, his 1995 novel *Metropolitan*.



Letters for publication should be e-mailed to [interzone@cix.co.uk](mailto:interzone@cix.co.uk) – or sent by conventional post to our editorial address (shown on the contents page). Please note that we reserve the right to shorten letters.

# LIBERTY SPIN

*Keith Brooke*

*"Ryan Edwards, sir. I'm from MSU, originally from Cornelius, L5." He looks 19, maybe 20, gangling and athletic, probably plays football for his frat club.*

*"And what do you think it'll be like in there, Ryan?"*

*The kid beams at the reportcam. "We've all seen the pix," he says. "It's wild in there. Place is a mess. I'm just proud to be on this team, sir."*

*"Some people say it should be left that way: a tribute to those who gave their lives for our freedom."*

*The kid falters. "Well, sir, that's not how I see it. I don't think those folk would be too pleased to see the state of Liberty. I think they'd be ashamed at how it is now. This here's an act of conservation: we're setting things right after all these years."*

Ryan followed the team leader, Svetlana, through the lock, twisting agilely to avoid getting a faceful of her boots. A flip of one hand against the hatch and he was floating through into Liberty.

Instantly he was struck by both the noise and the compactness of the habitat's docking facility. The reception lounge was little more than a corridor, in fact, with shuttle docking points of varying dimensions spaced at regular intervals for as far as he could see.

Svet was talking, but it was hard to make out her words above the din of voices and machinery. It was like suddenly emerging in the Groundhog Bar at the university on a Friday night.

Everyone had oriented themselves in roughly the same direction, feet out, heads towards Liberty's interior. It was a natural response to the port's layout: there was a clear up and down, with lighting in the "ceiling" and griptex on the "floor," with all the written signs and graphics aligned accordingly.

That was when it struck him: how strange this all was. He shouldn't be in freefall here, his feet should be firmly on the floor. It just wasn't right.

"Okay then, team." Svet rubbed her hands together. "Like I told you, we're heading straight in, no time to dawdle." Already, the lock had sealed and through a small viewpanel Ryan could see the shuttle peeling away.

"Why the hurry?" he asked.

Svet waved a hand around at the cramped area of the port. "This is the only restored docking lock an' we got to make room," she said. "Next team arrives in a few minutes."

The next team. Ryan nodded. Not so long ago he had thought there would only be one team, not twelve. Back at the interviews they'd implied that to get on the team was something special; now he knew that was just the hype.

"Come." Svet jack-knifed and then skimmed along the corridor, subtle hand movements directing herself around its gentle curve.

Ryan glanced at the others – there were ten on the team, but he barely knew them yet – and then pushed himself off.

After about 50 metres they came to an entryway. The walls here were painted dayglo yellow, with tall black lettering. The text said, "Welcome to" and then the name "High Geneva" had been crudely painted over, and the name "Liberty" added.

Ryan glanced at the others again, and they all looked as awe-struck as he felt. He had seen this junction so many times before in movies and sims.

Svet floated in the entryway above them, smiling. They had clearly chosen this route into the interior for impact.

"Welcome indeed," muttered someone – the blonde grad student from UIT, Ryan saw. He caught her eye,

smiled, pushed off.

Svet led the way through the entryway into a narrow passage, and all Ryan could see of the team leader were her boots and ass and flicking hands. The heat suddenly became intense, the air saturated, and the din shifted from human and machine to animal: birds crying, an insect buzz, rasping frogs, other animal cries he couldn't place. They were ascending a tunnel, a vertical corridor, barely shoulder-wide. Every couple of metres a torch had been stuck to the wall, filling the tunnel with uneven illumination and strange, flapping shadows.

The walls around him consisted of humus-rich soil, reinforced with scaffold-mesh to prevent them collapsing. He remembered the talks, the sims, he remembered the mad angle of Liberty's slow, tumbling spin that they had all gazed upon on approach. The entire habitat was tilted at about 30 degrees to its axis of rotation. Liberty's slow, lopsided spin was not enough to create any noticeable centrifugal gravity, but over the years the effect was clearly enough that any leaf-litter and other debris had collected towards either end of the habitat. The first team to re-enter Liberty had had to excavate their way in from the spaceport, situated, as it was, at the sunward end of the habitat.

The layer was a good 30 metres thick, although it was hard to tell where it really ended. As they rose through the tunnel, Ryan saw that the soil simply became less tightly packed until there were air-spaces throughout, like those in a sponge: the spin was enough to force the material to heap up, but not enough to compress it to any great degree. Towards the surface, the material was living: a tangled network of roots and stems and fungal hyphae. On close inspection, the matrix was crammed with animal life: annelids and nematodes, beetles, ants, centipedes, mice.

And then the scaffold-mesh ran out and the interwoven barrier of vegetation continued. An open area had been hacked out here, with several tunnels leading away through the mass.

Svet was nodding at each in turn as they emerged. "Yes," she said, "hard as it is to be sure, we *have* reached the surface. Welcome to Liberty."

The team had emerged in Jura, one of the habitat's three valleys. Svet told them that they were to head down-valley to a settlement called St Claude, where they would make their base. Following her lead, the team strapped miners' lamps onto their foreheads and then set out along one of the tunnels.

Ryan let himself spin slowly as he floated through the tangle of overgrowth. The vegetation was a strange mixture of leaf, root and stem: packed tightly enough that humus and soil particles had lodged into the matrix, the atmosphere so saturated that air-roots could take water direct from the air. Chlorophyll levels were low in most of the plants – a result of the murky twilight of Liberty's interior – and so the fleshy stems and roots looked pale and lifeless, a barrier of bones.

He'd never seen anything like this. Habitats were usually so tightly controlled: systems managers would

never allow anything remotely resembling wilderness to take hold. This... this was primordial. Even Terran jungles weren't like this, from what he'd seen in the sims.

He glanced across at Randi, a squat, long-haired environmental engineering student from Delhi – the first Terran Ryan had ever met. "Seen anything like this on Earth?"

Randi started, and Ryan felt suddenly self-conscious for breaking the silence that had descended around the team.

He was spared further embarrassment by their sudden emergence into open space. One by one they floated free of the vegetation. Ryan slowed his spin, the perspectives suddenly giddy. Liberty followed what had at one time been a standard design: a cylinder close to seven kilometres in diameter and over 20 long – the largest of its kind when it was built; three long valleys alternating with three window strips, mirrors aligned outside to direct sunlight into the interior.

He'd seen the plans.

But, turning slowly, trying to understand, he had trouble fitting what he saw into that plan now. Decades of the habitat's slow, misaligned rotation had caused debris to gather towards either pole, so that the interior was no longer a neat cylinder. And the vegetation...

He saw it now: the faint delineation of the habitat's three valleys. The overgrowth was shallower there, growing up and away, heading phototropically for the sun, so that plant growth climbed to its highest over the three long window strips, which were entirely obscured by the jungle.

"What...?" That was Randi, looking around, starting to panic. The interior of Liberty was growing perceptibly darker.

"It's okay," said Svet. "That's the 15-minute cycle."

Ryan remembered from the briefings. Although there was always some light reflecting in from the mirrors, the wobble in Liberty's rotation meant that there was a 15-minute day-night cycle, when it went from gloomy to even gloomier.

Parts of St Claude protruded from the overgrowth, scattered rooftops standing defiant against the spread of vegetation.

"Home sweet home," muttered Ryan, as they approached.

The team pulled up against a rooftop terrace, catching handholds and tying their packs down.

"Before you go in," said Svet. "I just want to remind you that this place is a graveyard. Chances are you'll find human remains: this is the resting place of those who stood up for our liberation. We must treat all that we find with the utmost respect. And, of course, we have the eyes of the system's media upon us."

Ryan looked at Randi. He looked calm, attentive: he seemed to have taken Svet's words in the right spirit. After all, it wasn't *his* people who had been liberated: the Terrans had been the repressers.

A little over two centuries ago, Liberty – or High Geneva as it was called then – had been the scene of the

first successful stand against the Terran hegemony in space. Sonny Cenko and his fellow liberationists had staged a coup, deporting anyone who opposed them and then sealing the habitat off from outsiders. While the UN Space Authority had prepared its counter-strike, Cenko and his team had re-engineered the habitat, following a plan that must have been years in preparation.

It was some time before anyone realized what was happening, as Liberty's drift away from its high Earth orbit became more pronounced. And then Liberty's silence had been broken by one final broadcast: Sonny Cenko's announcement that they were heading for the stars. The habitat's delta-vee was modest to start with, but the steady push from its network of ion-boosters would give a cumulative effect that would allow Liberty to break out of the Sun's gravity-well: Liberty had become an arkship.

Liberty's flight became a symbol of the revolution: the long siege as they held off UNSA's best attempts to break into the habitat, the first recorded instances of space warfare as they used meteor-defence masers to defend their boosters from sabotage. Eventually, they were far enough beyond Earth's reach that it was no longer cost-effective for UNSA to pursue them. The rebels had won, and they had triggered the domino effect that led to the Joint Statement of Independence.

"Irony, isn't it?" Ryan said to Randi, as they checked out an apartment in the building where they had landed a few minutes before.

Randi squinted at him, down his hooked nose, hair floating around his head. "Irony?"

"This: Liberty. Two centuries ago it was at the heart of the revolution. Two centuries, and in all that time your Plexus-Government and all the confederations and communities of the Solar System have barely communicated."

"There is trade," said Randi. "And the irony?"

"Liberty's come back. They failed. They never broke out of the gravity well at all and now Liberty's looping back, crossing Earth's orbit, and we can see that this thing that triggered the revolution was a disaster, a stupid mistake. And now it's being used for this: the exploratory teams – Terrans and us working side by side to restore the habitat in a spirit of collaboration and unity and all that."

"It seems a sensible project."

"Sure. But it's taken two centuries and a rediscovered icon of the liberation to get the two sides talking."

"As I say, there is a steady flow of trade. And 200 years is not such a long time, in any case. For you and I, perhaps – we are young. But on Earth we live long and healthy lives: there are people who were alive during the conflict – some members of Plexus-Government were directly involved."

"Seems a long time to hold a grudge."

"Your perspective affects your judgement," said Randi. "Your fight for independence matters more to you than it does to me. Your society is ingrained with this grudge, as you call it. On Earth there is still animosity in the older generation, but to me and my generation it is all in the past: Liberty is an opportunity for us to collaborate on an equal footing, a chance to move forward."

"You've been watching the media spin." That was Lacey, the grad student from UIT. She was studying to be a biosystems engineer and cynic. Ryan didn't know how well she was doing at the former, but she was well on the way to majoring in the latter.

Randi nodded and smiled. "You think they would select anyone from Earth who did not toe the party line?" he asked gently.

"Okay, conservationist?" she said, spinning to face Ryan. She'd already made some cutting comments about Ryan's handling of the reportcam interview before they'd entered Liberty.

Ryan glared at her. "I told you: I'm as green as the next guy. I'm studying ecology, aren't I? I just think that this thing's the biggest conservation project going: our chance to restore Liberty to how it was when Sonny Cenko catalysed the revolution. Imagine being able to live in Liberty again!"

She was by the window, now. "But look," she said. "Spinning Liberty will destroy all this: an ecosphere that's stabilized itself over two centuries."

Ryan shrugged and smiled at Randi. "Our selection process for the project was a bit more liberal out here," he explained, nodding towards Lacey. "We let all kinds in..."

Ryan was with Lacey and a structural engineering student called Ezra when he found the bones.

The three of them air-swam into a level 2 apartment in the heart of St Claude. It was dark down here, below the level of the vegetation, and the only source of light was their three headlamps. The windows had been forced inwards by the pressure of plant-growth and it was hard work to penetrate more than a couple of metres into the main room.

Ryan hooked a foot into the tangled growth while he peeled off his sodden shirt. He balled it up and wrung it between his hands, but the moisture just welled up between his fingers, clinging to every surface. He spun it instead, watching the droplets fly through the air. Then he hooked the shirt into a loop of his belt.

Lacey and Ezra were stripping down, too, Ezra lean and dark, Lacey skeletally thin and pale, like the vegetation all around them. They'd only been here a couple of hours, but already the team were becoming comfortable in each other's company. The real work would start next shift, after they'd had some rest: surveying and mapping the local ecosystem and infrastructure, so the renovation team could have as full a picture of Liberty as possible before they stabilized her orbit and spun her up again. For now, they were just reconnoitring the local area. Ryan suspected it was an excuse for them to get used to the conditions and reassure themselves that there were no bogeymen lurking in the ruins.

He turned, reached into the thicket and parted it as well as he could. There were some pictures on the walls here: bold slashes of colour on a dark background. Ugly things.

The pale tendrils of vegetation were fleshy and yielding – some would burst if you squeezed too tight. That was something Ryan was getting used to now: every-



thing in this microgravity regime was so delicate.

He pulled at some vegetation again, but this time it was tougher, the stems rigid, stiff, stacked closely one on the other.

"Er... Ryan," said Ezra. "I think..."

A shape in front of him: two dark circles below a white domed structure. A skull!

He jerked away sharply, tumbling over in freefall. He stopped himself from throwing up, caught himself against the door frame. The stiff, white stems – they were ribs.

"Oh man," he groaned.

Lacey was keying a note into her wristpad. "Okay," she said. "I've marked this room down. We seal it off and leave it for a clearance team, okay?"

Ryan pushed himself back out into the lobby. That skeleton had probably been there for close to two centuries – no-one knew how long the population had survived in Liberty, only that none were left alive now.

"Come on," he muttered. "Let's go back up. Shift's nearly over."

*A clearance team heads over the vegetation towards Jura's spaceport entryway. Three body-bags stretch out behind them, like a string of sausages.*

*"Tell me, Lacey: is this a common occurrence?"*

*The interviewee looks uncertain. "Kind of," she says. Her tone is nasal, her thin face puffed up – she's clearly suffering microgravity adjustment syndrome. "We've found some bodies in the settlements. From what we can see they had a peaceful end – things just didn't work out for them."*

*"What happens to them from here, Lacey?"*

*"Oh, they're treated with the utmost respect. The teams make every effort to identify them and inform any descendants, and then they all get a decent funeral, carried out according to what we can determine of their religious preferences."*

*"And how is the exploratory team's work going here, Lacey?"*

*"Oh, you know. It's going kind of fine."*

*The view cuts to a distant shot of Liberty: an antiquated, cylindrical structure, clad unevenly in construction slag. "Work to stabilize Liberty continues apace. Jefferson vernier systems are being used to damp down the rotational wobble, and boosters are being anchored in place to direct the habitat into a more stable orbit, before shipping it out to L5 where it belongs. When the wobble has been damped down, work can begin on redeploying the verniers to introduce axial spin for centrifugal gravity, although that will be on hold until the interior surveys have been completed. Francoise Colhoune of the Holding Group's Joint Action Committee says –"*

*Cut to 40-something woman in skiing clothes.*

*"We confidently expect Liberty to be ready for recolonization in seven months' time."*

*"I've been Brady Mitchell, Yahoo!News, Liberty."*

"That creep didn't give me a chance!" snapped Lacey.

"An' I thought a sophisticated media-chick like you would have been wise to all their tricks."

Randi was winding her up and she knew it and still she couldn't stop herself. "I tell you, they cut out all of what I said about how things aren't as clear-cut as they're making out."

"Oh, it's going to happen," said Ryan, over a half-empty tube of beer. "They've got too much riding on it to let any of our reports swing things. We're just part of the media circus, is all."

"Oh, listen to you," said Lacey. "Believe me: there's a whole lot going on behind the scenes that will settle the fate of Liberty. We can't let them destroy this. We've got ourselves a unique ecosystem here: isolated for 200 years, natural selection forced by extreme conditions – there's never been anywhere like this."

"Evolution isn't that fast," said Mart, another Terran from Melbourne.

"Maybe not, but the selection pressure has created a unique ecosphere: it's weeded out all the species and splices that can't cope with these conditions. All our reports reinforce that observation. All I'm saying is that our evidence can be used in the conservationist argument for preserving Liberty as a living monument to the liberation."

"Oh, you know," said Randi, pinching his nose to mimic Lacey. "It's going kind of, you know, fine."

Ryan nudged the tube of beer and it floated across towards Lacey. She caught it, took a long pull. "Come on," he said to the team. "Are you guys coming over to Annecy or what?"

Three of the teams working Jura had arranged to get together off-shift. Svet had okayed it, said one of the project aims was fraternization between diverse groups of young people and what better way than with a few tubes and a bit of music?

Ryan pushed off and Lacey joined him, angling up so she could clip the beer tube onto his belt. He smiled at her, suddenly awkward. "Randi's a clown," he told her. "Something to do with the inbreeding on Earth."

Randi bulleted past, goosing Ryan on the way. "Watch what you saying, space monkey."

Ryan kicked after him, giving chase, but the Terran was too agile. "Hey," Ryan called after a while. "How come you're so good in freefall?"

"I trained, didn't I? You think I'd come up here and be made to look dumb by you space monkeys, do you?" He kicked off again.

Lacey drifted by, just then, put a hand on Ryan's arm. "Let him go," she said. "Randi's okay."

"It's incredible," Lacey said, again. "This whole system's struck its own energy deal. Its orbit takes it just inside Venus's orbit, and then out beyond Mars, yet the ecosphere seems to have come up with its own dynamic equilibrium – a gaian balance where the ecosystem adjusts to the different levels of insolation to keep the atmosphere and climate pretty much stable."

Ryan wasn't sure that he could take her fervour this morning. He still felt rough from the off-shift party. He

tried to concentrate on counting and identifying the invertebrates in his metre-cube transect.

"It won't make any difference," he muttered. He still saw this as little more than an academic exercise: plotting what could happen in a major habitat when things go wrong. It was the kind of thing you could never simulate. He reached into the vegetation and plucked out a hamster. The things had no fear. He stroked it, then set it sailing through the air, clear of his metre-cube.

"Maybe not," said Lacey. "But you have to try." She came in closer to him then. "I have friends," she said. "I'm mailing data out to them whenever I get the chance, helping them build the case for the preservation of Liberty."

Her hand on his back.

"You have to try, Ryan."

He twisted, squinting at her. Trying to read the signals.

The belts they wore were specially designed for microgravity: lots of loops and clips and stikpads to stop things floating away. Right now, Lacey hooked a finger through one of his loops and drew him closer.

"It's getting dark," she said. "Fifteen-minute cycle. You can't see to do that now, can you?"

"And don't wander over into Neuchâtel, you hear? That's Jackie's patch."

Ryan thought the rivalry between the two team-leaders was amusing: the two wouldn't talk, wouldn't allow their teams to mix. There must be some mixed-up personal history between them. Randi said they were old lovers, but he wouldn't say how he knew, so everyone assumed he was making it up.

But mixed-up personal histories didn't explain Jackie's heavy mob tactics: two over-muscled creeps with stunstix, threatening Ryan and Lacey with a good kicking if they strayed over that way ever again.

"They're hiding something," said Lacey. "But what?"

Ryan shrugged. "Come on," he said, reaching down for Lacey's hand. "We've got work to do."

"That entire sector," Lacey went on. "Why won't they let us see what they've found in Neuchâtel?"

Ryan sighed. "Don't tell me: you want us to sneak back over there and find out?"

She tugged on his hand and let go, sailing ahead. Twisting, she looked back at him. "Fuck no," she said. "Didn't you see the size of those stunstix? I may be 'that crazy extremist bitch,' to quote your friend Randi, but I'm not *that* stupid."

The whole ecosphere was a distorted jungle ecosystem, he realized. The three valleys were the forest floor, with roots, air-roots, stems and trunks tangled together into an often-impenetrable mass. As Ryan had observed when he first entered Liberty from the spaceport, there was no clear border between soil and air, but rather a gradual transition made up of a spongy matrix of tendrils, roots, fungi and air-spaces.

Unimpeded by gravity, the trees and creepers twisted and writhed away from the forest floors – he had measured one rubber tree trunk in excess of 300 metres in

length, supported on its tortuous journey towards the light by the mass of surrounding vegetation. Everything grew, by various indirect routes, towards the window-strips, where they could compete to capture the sun's photons.

It was the window-strips that defined the true forest canopy, a sudden flourishing of light and colour and life. In Jura, it was hard to identify much of the plant-life as all Ryan could see were stems and roots. Here in the "canopy," the diversity was staggering. In one two-metre-cube transect alone, Ryan counted 26 varieties of orchid, a mixture of naturalized splices and pure stock that might still have counterparts in some remote corners of what remained of the Terran jungles.

He pushed his way through the canopy for some time, amazed every few metres by some new wonder: a bright ochre tree frog; a hot red passion flower with sexual organs thrusting up out of a dense central fringe; avocados, floating in loosely anchored clusters; a wide-winged butterfly, drifting across a clearing with the occasional delicate flick of its azure wings.

"You see what I mean now, don't you?" said Lacey, drifting along in his wake – enjoying his enjoyment, he sensed.

He turned, pulled her towards him. "I have it all planned out," he said, slowly. "I'm two years into a degree in applied ecology, grad work in one of the new habitats, then professional accreditation as a life systems engineer. Creating habitats that work, where everything slots together neatly and efficiently. That's what my life's going to be."

"Everything works together in Liberty," she said. "It has to."

She rotated, a slow spin, arms wide. Then she started to draw her arms in, speeding up as she did so. "They're going to clean it out, though. Spin up Liberty and crush everything inside. Then they're going to replace it with one of your tidy, efficient ecospheres." She stopped spinning and smiled innocently at him. "Hey," she concluded, "you never know: there might even be work here for you."

The pool was something else.

Ryan secured himself to the vegetation above its still surface and surveyed it, sweeping his headlamp beam from side to side. Two metres by six, maybe ankle-deep at the middle, it had formed in a hollow about half a kilometre from the spaceport. The vegetation twisted across it in an unruly mat, but it cleared in places. There were frogs in there, and insects scrabbling across the water, given sure-footing by the surface tension.

"Hey, Randi! You seen this?"

Svet had reassigned them today. "You got to *mix*," she told them. "Not pair off like hormone-stuffed adolescents."

"So," said Randi, hauling himself through the overgrowth. "You got yourself a puddle."

He didn't understand. "The air's saturated," Ryan said. "There's next to no gravity. Water doesn't exactly run downhill like it does on Earth, Randi. How many streams or pools have you seen? No. This is the first I've seen, too. It must have taken decades to form."



"Oh fuck."

"Hnnh?"

Randi was staring at a patch of vegetation that had been disturbed recently. Fine stems had been broken, branches pushed into an unruly mess.

And then he saw it.

Another body: only this time it was recent. Flesh on the bones. Skin. Eyes staring out at them, mouth half-open. There was a lopsided red globe floating in front of the man's stomach, expanding steadily.

Blood, Ryan realized: an expanding globe of blood, escaping from a stomach wound, held together by surface tension.

He fumbled at his wristpad, raised it to his mouth. "Svet," he said. "Svet, will you answer me, please?"

He dreamed of the body that night. Dreamed of bloated rats swimming through the air with occasional flicks of their tails, gathering around the man's torso to gorge themselves.

He woke up, panicking. Breathing far too fast.

Lacey's hand on his chest. "Hey," she said. "It's okay."

The carbon dioxide had pooled around his head again as he slept: bad dreams, waking up hyperventilating. That was all.

They'd questioned him that day. At one stage he thought they suspected him and Randi of knifing the guy, who turned out to be a member of one of the other Jura teams – Ryan recalled him from parties as a mouthy creep. They'd been easier on Randi, didn't want to provoke an international incident. They put it down to rivalry, a fight over a girl, maybe; a lovers' tiff, maybe.

When Ryan closed his eyes he could picture the ball of blood swelling out of the guy's belly. It could only have happened minutes before they found him. He wondered if any of this would leak out to the newsfeeds. Only if they could find a good publicity angle on it, he supposed: the human drama behind an international collaborative project.

He slept again.

The 15-minute cycle was barely noticeable now, the wobble in Liberty's rotation almost completely damped down. Rumours were circulating about when the next stage would be announced: the firing of the boosters to slow Liberty down, to knock the habitat out of its erratic orbit and into a path that would allow it to be steered into position at L5. If Ryan stayed onboard throughout the manoeuvre, he'd end up almost back home in Cornelius. Hell of a way to hitch a lift home!

The body had really flaked Lacey out. Ryan didn't understand until he got her alone and insisted that she tell him what in hell was bugging her.

"It's *me* who should be screwed up by it," he told her. "It was me and Randi found him."

"Oh yeah?" There was something cold in her eyes, something gone. She was scared, he realized. "I knew him," she said. "Milo Krespov. Went to UIT. He was a year ahead of me."

"I'm sorry."

"No," she said. "It's more than that. Milo was an activist. It was Milo who got me hooked up in all this, convinced me it matters. Someone must be onto us."

"Lacey, they're hardly going to do that to him just for mailing inside information out to a network of green lobby groups, are they?"

"Maybe he found out something he shouldn't have."

The scale of the revolt took even Lacey by surprise, she later confessed to Ryan. "I knew we'd infiltrated the project, but I had no idea how thoroughly!"

In all, there were something like 30 activists in the project teams inside Liberty. Enough to secure the spaceport and welcome onboard several more shuttles full of supporters. It all happened so quickly, so unexpectedly, that there was almost no violence. For half a day, Jackie and three of her heavies holed up in Neuchâtel, armed only with stunstix, but they soon gave in.

Fifteen hours after the first rumours of trouble, a crowd of over a hundred gathered on or around a rooftop terrace in the Savoie valley. The speaker was a small man with peppered silver hair and a brisk manner.

"I would ask for your cooperation during the transition," he told the crowd, after introducing himself as Gerard Sykes, coordinator of the Cenko Tribute Board.

"The Liberty renovation project is unofficially cancelled, as I'm sure the authorities will confirm after they have given up trying to get us out of here. Liberty will be allowed to continue on its way unhindered. Attempts to spin the habitat and reintroduce artificial gravity have been curtailed, out of respect for the natural ecological balance and in tribute to the memory of Sonny Cenko and his revolutionary comrades.

"Each and every one of you is welcome to remain in the habitat with us for the duration of this conflict, but I warn you that we are bound to come under assault from the authorities who will want to recapture Liberty. Those who wish to leave will be ferried away by shuttle. You have an hour to inform your team leader of your choice."

"It's really neat, don't you see?" Lacey was brimming over with excitement.

"See what?"

"Two centuries ago this is exactly what Sonny Cenko did: a quiet revolution with next to no violence. We've taken them completely by surprise. Now all we have to do is hold out for a few months until our orbit's taken us beyond their reach. Eventually we'll be far enough away to make it uneconomical to keep hassling us and then we can leave this place in peace, knowing that Liberty will be clear of human interference for another 200 years."

"As soon as you come back you'll be arrested."

"That's a chance we take. We have people in influential positions. Chances are the authorities will be embarrassed into inaction."

"You knew about all this."

She looked away. "Hell, Ryan, I'm no Gerard Sykes. I sort of knew something like this was a possibility, but that kind of information was in the hands of the people

in a position to make strategic decisions.”

Big talk, he understood. Lacey had always been full of big talk. Now it had caught up with her and she had to carry through with it.

“You going to stay?” he asked.

“I... I think so. You?”

He nodded. “I think so, too.”

When he told Svet, she hugged him. He hadn’t expected that, hadn’t expected her passion. It turned out she was close to Gerard Sykes, someone he was happy to delegate to.

Some of the others were surprises, too. Randi, for one. “What, you mean you’re staying?” Lacey demanded of him.

“Sure thing,” he said. “You think just ‘cos I’m from Earth I don’t have any right to a political conscience?”

Big Ezra was another who chose to stay. “I been part of this from the out,” he said, half-apologetically. “It’s like it always is: big business seeing an opportunity and going all out to exploit it. Can you imagine this place in five years’ time? Cleaned out and scrubbed up and crammed full of leisure facilities and hotels: the Sonny Cenko Experience, revolution as recreation. That’s what they were doing, screwing us over like they always do.”

Short of cutting their way in, there wasn’t a great deal the authorities could do about the Liberty revolt: there were only so many ways into the habitat and they were easy to defend. Like Sonny Cenko before them, they had the meteor-defence masers at their disposal, in case any aggressors strayed too close. The threat alone would probably be enough to keep spacecraft at a safe distance.

Ryan and Lacey took to exploring the habitat, continuing with their ecological survey work – the place was unique, after all – and making occasional trips into the settlements to try to build up a picture of what life must have been like during and after the last Liberty revolt.

“Hey, Lacey, Ryan – I think you should see this.”

That was Ezra’s voice, calling them from his wristpad, somewhere down in the bowels of Pontarlier. Ryan and Lacey exchanged a glance. That was in Jackie’s patch, where she’d set her heavies to guard with stunstix.

Ten minutes later, they were down on the ground floor of a building in Pontarlier. Ezra had hooked himself to a seat at a console and was staring at a screenful of code.

“What is it?”

“Nothing.”

“What do you mean, ‘nothing’?” Ryan studied the screen, but it wasn’t a scripting language he knew.

“I thought maybe I could find some sort of record,” Ezra explained. “Something that would tell us about the last days. But there’s nothing.”

“Looks like the OS is fucked,” said Lacey. She drifted over to a doorway and peered through.

“The operating system is fine,” said Ezra. “But what gets me is the system has been wiped. Someone’s come

here and deliberately erased all the records.”

“What? Recently?” Ryan asked.

Ezra nodded. “Why would they wipe the system unless there was something to cover up?”

“There must be other records,” said Lacey.

“It’s like this everywhere I look. But I tell you, I’m going to keep looking.”

They found the room full of bones three blocks away.

It was two days after they’d talked to Ezra and the three had agreed to work together to try to find out what had happened two centuries previously.

It was the basement of one of the tower blocks: just open the door and the air was thick with bones, drifting in the microgravity.

It was like some kind of processing area. “It doesn’t make sense,” said Lacey. “The recovery teams were so careful to bag up each skeleton separately, so they could be identified and descendants informed.”

“But how many did they do that for?” asked Ryan. “Fifty? A hundred? Can you imagine the bad press if all people ever saw coming out of Liberty was body bags? They did it for a few, because people would expect it, and then they were probably just going to quietly get rid of the rest of them.”

“What I want to know,” said Ezra, holding a bone out for the others to see, “is why they’ve been taking samples.” There was a notch in the bone where some kind of biopsy sample had been removed. “What were they testing for?”

The first assault took place two days later. A two-pronged attack: one team of marines heading for the spaceport were seen off by a low-energy maser strike – the first was a warning, but next time everyone knew it would be full power. A few seconds later, another team arrived in a stealth shuttle at a service port at the opposite end of the habitat. They weren’t detected until they triggered a vibration alarm in the airlock. Sykes spoke to them out of a small vidscreen set into the door, informing them at length of the booby-traps they would encounter if they sealed the outside door and started to cycle the airlock.

They believed him, which Ryan, watching the exchange on a public screen in St Claude, thought wise.

“One they missed,” Ezra told them.

They were in an apartment in Martigny, viewing the display of a personal organizer on the main wall.

“Go to April 15,” said Ezra, and the date highlighted and then a woman’s voice spoke to them from two centuries in the past.

“Not much to report today. Mr Cenko tells us all is well, but then he always was the optimist. This whole business scares the shit out of me, I’m telling you. We and our descendants will be in this habitat for centuries before we even encounter another star system. That’s a hell of a long time to keep a self-contained ecosystem balanced and working. Not to mention keeping the tokamak working – our only source of energy once the



sun's just another star in space. Did we leap into this without thinking things through? Ted was telling me that our departure has triggered a whole series of revolts in the colonies – maybe we didn't have to leave. But hell, we've done it and, as Mr Cenko keeps telling us, everything is fine. Time to turn in."

That was it. "So what's special about that?" asked Ryan. "Just a diary entry."

"Exactly," said Ezra. "Nothing special. But it's the last entry. Think what everyone assumes happened in Liberty: they got it wrong, they fucked up. Their boosters just put them in an eccentric orbit, not on the way to the stars as they intended. They lost control of things: maybe some of the boosters failed and the uneven distribution of the remaining ones counteracted the normal rotation and gave it this odd wobble, reducing the insides to microgravity. The inhabitants struggled on for a while, but slowly died out."

"And?"

"It's a gradual decline. Why does this diary just cut out, without even a hint that things are starting to go wrong?"

"Maybe she just lost interest," said Ryan. "I kept a diary when I was a kid, but one day I just stopped. I couldn't be bothered with it. Maybe that happened to her."

"That's what I thought, too," said Ezra. "The first time I found something like this. But this is the third time I've found some kind of record that cuts off on April 15. It seems that whoever was wiping the systems didn't get this far before our revolt."

"So what are you saying?"

"Something happened to them. Something sudden. Maybe one final assault by UNSA. Too late to take over the habitat and bring it back, but not too late to wipe out the rebels. Maybe they gassed them or something. Retribution."

Lacey had been quiet. Now she said, "What that doesn't tell us is why someone has been systematically trying to destroy the evidence: wiping the system of all records, hiding most of the remains so they could be disposed of quietly."

"It must have been the Terrans," said Ryan. "They must have infiltrated the renovation project so they could clear up any evidence of their past activities. Randi told me that some members of their Plexus-Government were actually alive 200 years ago – they'd been actively involved in the conflict. Maybe they wanted to cover up what that involvement had been." That would explain the samples taken from the bones they had found: any remains that bore evidence of the genocide – traces of poison, or whatever had been used – had been kept behind, hidden from public scrutiny.

"And they didn't want to rock the boat," said Ezra. "Just when 'the spirit of collaboration' is in the air, just when trade with Earth is picking up... No-one's going to want past genocides dug over again, are they?"

Gerard Sykes had taken some convincing, but once he had seen the evidence they'd compiled he was clearly

impressed.

"That was one of their mistakes, wasn't it?" he said. "Sending you bright young kids out here to work together. Chances are you'll find things out." He laughed. "You know what we're going to do? We're going to tell everyone what you've found. We've set up our own studio down in Aix-en-Savoie, so we can broadcast to anyone who'll listen. We have people in the colonies who can ensure that this makes it into all the newsfeeds."

The broadcast was stunning: Gerard Sykes' measured tones, over a backdrop of floating bones; cuts to diary extracts, the very blandness of which acted as a counterpoint to the horrors Sykes was exposing. Ryan and the others watched it on a screen in St Claude.

Liberty would become a symbol all over again: representative of the horrors of the military-industrial political system that held sway both on Earth and in space.

That night they partied.

*"And finally, latest news from Liberty tells of good progress in the renovation work. Everything's on schedule for the habitat to be brought into position in L5 in a few weeks' time."*

*"I've been Brady Mitchell, Yahoo!News, Liberty."*

He woke up, feeling that something was wrong. Bad dreams again, no doubt.

Lacey. She wasn't there.

He looked around the dim interior of the room they'd been sharing in St Claude. They'd cleared out the intruding vegetation, introduced some kind of order. Settling down, Randi had teased them more than once. No sign of her... maybe she'd just gone out to the communal latrine. If he went looking for her she'd accuse him of being over-possessive.

He pushed off, floated across the room. Hell, she could call him what she liked, he was possessive enough to care when she went missing in the night.

By the time he reached the rooftop terrace a sick fear had lodged itself in his gut. He squatted, then straightened, diving up and away from St Claude, taking the direct route through the gulf of air towards the sunward end of Jura valley.

He could see figures clustered around the tunnel that led down to the spaceport. Waiting patiently, taking their turn. No lights, despite the gloom. No sound, other than the occasional murmured exchange. Nothing to draw attention to themselves.

He hung back, watching.

She was there. He saw her small figure, her blonde hair glinting silver in the half-light, he recognized her, more than anything, by the way she moved.

He waited until her turn came, until she was poised ready to push down the tunnel.

"No goodbyes?"

The small group froze, then started to peer around, trying to pinpoint where the voice had originated. More murmured exchanges, then.

A few seconds later, Lacey drifted clear of the group. Her companions resumed their evacuation.

"You're on your own, aren't you, Ryan?" She knew roughly where he had concealed himself. "You followed me."

Like a faithful spaniel.

"There's room on the shuttle, Ryan. You can come with us, if you like."

"Us?"

"Liberty's being left alone," she said. "Left to follow its course. A place like Liberty's better in the people's imagination. In reality it has too much historical baggage."

"Too much evidence."

He could sense her shrugging. "Call it what you will. We're giving you the opportunity to leave with us, Ryan. Are you man enough to take it?"

They'd pinpointed him now. Lacey was talking directly to him. And one of the others was aiming a handgun at him.

"Do your friends agree?"

Lacey glanced over her shoulder, saw the gun, said something Ryan couldn't make out.

She looked back at Ryan. "Make your mind up," she said. "Quickly."

She'd let go of the branch that had been anchoring her and now she drifted slowly across the line of fire, shielding Ryan. He turned, plunged back into the overgrowth.

He didn't think they'd chase him, but he fled in any case, finally ending up exhausted in the hollowed bole of a eucalyptus about three kilometres down-valley from the port. He couldn't understand the feelings raging through him: anger and betrayal, confusion, passion. She'd abandoned him, yet she'd saved him, but what in God's name did it matter?

The remaining rebels gathered once again around the roof terrace in Aix-en-Savoie. Their numbers were way down: a quick head count told them that there were only 37 remaining in Liberty. No Svet, no Randi, so many familiar faces absent... so many betrayals!

It had been a gradual withdrawal, Ryan realized. Sykes hadn't been seen for two days; some of the other absentees had been seen more recently. Lacey must have been among the last to leave.

"They're going to let us go," said Ryan. It scared him, talking in front of this crowd, but he made himself do it. "Just like 200 years ago: they've worked out that it's in their best interests to leave Liberty alone. I think they realized how hard it would be to cover up all the evidence of what the Terrans did here to Sonny Cenko and the others. Sykes and his so-called rebels were just here to make sure everything was covered up. They're going to let Liberty go and then destroy it."

"And us," he added. "We know too much."

"What about the broadcast?" asked someone. "Why did Sykes do that if he was lying to us?"

Ryan gestured to Ezra. "We checked out the man's so-called studio," said Ezra. "It was a lie. There's nothing we can use in this entire habitat to communicate with the colonies. They've wrecked anything that could be of use."

"We should have known," said Ezra. "They let us go

too easily. We played into their hands and now we're stranded. Isolated."

They debated their position for some time. Some argued that it might not be so bad: the habitat had been self-sustaining for two centuries, so they would be able to survive. Eventually they'd be able to establish communications. If nothing else, their descendants would be here when the habitat's orbit next came close to Earth's in 200 years.

"Remember what they did last time," said Ryan, eventually. "All the evidence points to genocide. They don't leave things to chance."

They had time, though. The authorities would want Liberty to be well on its way before any 'tragedy' occurred. Time... time to search for evidence of sabotage. A time-delayed device in the powered-down remains of Liberty's tokamak, perhaps. Strategically placed bombs around the habitat's structure. It would be something destructive this time, he was sure. Something to obliterate the evidence. But they would do their utmost to find it, to dismantle any device before it was triggered.

*"...after much deliberation and consultation, the renovation project has been withdrawn."*

*The man reads from his prepared speech, staring straight out at the viewer. Eye contact. More sincere that way.*

*"There's been a lot of lobbying and never let it be said that we are not open to rational debate and persuasion. We now recognize that it would be a mistake to interrupt the fragile balance of Liberty's ecosphere, simply so that we can create a shrine to the memory of leaders past."*

*"Liberty is an icon, a symbol of what we stand for and the open society that we have nurtured. Indeed, the proposal that the habitat of Sonny Cenko should be preserved as it is was put forward by members of the exploratory teams themselves. Now Liberty will become even more a symbol of our spirit of discovery as that valiant group of young ecologists have chosen to stay with the habitat to study its progress and development."*

*"Our thoughts go with them, as do our hopes."*

*Cuts to head and shoulders shot of a young man, hair flying around his face. The backdrop is a convincing facsimile of the now-familiar pix of Liberty's rampant interior. "This is a real honour," he says eagerly. "An exciting adventure in ecological science and I am proud to be involved."*

*"So says Randi Masood, one of the young scientists who has chosen to stay with Liberty. I've been Brady Mitchell, Yahoo!News, Liberty."*

**Keith Brooke**, born 1966, lives in Brightlingsea, Essex. He was once a member of "the Interzane brat-pack" and had three sf novels published at a relatively early age – *Keepers of the Peace* (1990), *Expatria* and *Expatria Incorporated* (both 1991). Nowadays, he raises a large family, holds down a full-time job, runs the on-line magazine *infinity-plus*, and still manages to find time to write new stories. His most recent solo pieces include "The People of the Sea" (issue 107), "Queen Bee" (issue 119), "Resting Place" (issue 128) and "Segue" (issue 132).



# THE RED KANVON Billy of Bailey

Cory Doctorow

**B**illy and Principal Andrew Altz went all the way back to kindergarten, when Billy had convinced Mitchell McCoy that the green fingerpaint was Shamrock Shake, and watched with glee as the little babyface had scarfed it all down. Billy knew that Andrew Altz knew his style: refined, controlled, and above all, *personal*. Billy never would've dropped a dozen M-80s down the girls' toilet. His stuff was always one-on-one, and possessed of a degree of charm and subtlety.

But nevertheless, here was Billy, along with the sixth-grade bumper-crop of nasty-come-latelies, called on the carpet in front of Andrew Altz's massive desk. Andrew Altz was an athletic forty, a babyface true-and-through, and a charismatic thought-leader in his demographic.

Hormones. They were the problem.

Billy Bailey was the finest heel the sixth grade had ever seen – a true artisan who kept his brand pure and unsullied, picking and managing his strategic alliances with the utmost care and acumen. He'd dumped Bang-inBumpin Fireworks (a division of The Shanghai Novelty Company, Ltd.) in the *fourth* grade, fer chrissakes. Their ladyfingers were too small to bother with; their M-80s were so big that you'd have to be a lunatic to go near them.

But sixth grade was the Year of the Hormone at Pepsi Elementary. Boys who'd been babyfaces since kindergarten suddenly sprouted acne, pubic hair, and an

uncontrollable urge to impress girls. Their weak brands were no match for the onslaught of -osterones and -ogens that flooded their brains, and in short order they found themselves switching over to heel.

As a result, the sixth grade was experiencing a heel glut. Last year's Little Lord Fauntleroy's were now busy snapping bras, dropping textbooks, cracking grading computers, and blowing up the girls' toilets.

Hormones. They made Billy want to puke.

Andrew Altz gave them his sternest stare, the one over the top of his half-rims that was guaranteed to reduce a fourth-grader to tears. The poseurs alongside of Billy shuffled their feet nervously and looked away. Billy struggled to control his anger, and to meet Andrew Altz's stare with his tried-and-true antidote, a carefree, mischievous grin.

"Ten thousand dollars," Andrew Altz said, for the third time. "What will your parents say, I wonder, when I tell them that it will cost ten thousand dollars to replumb the girls' change-room? Boys, I wouldn't want to be in your shoes when that happens. I imagine that it will go very hard for all of you." He treated them all to another megawatt of stare.

"*But I didn't do it!*" wailed Mitchell McCoy, who'd gotten a Blue Ribbon in the fifth-grade Science Fair for a consumer research report on relative inflammabilities of a range of allegedly fire-proof blue-jeans.

Billy shot him a look of disgust. *But I didn't do it!* Suck.

Andrew Altı looked at him. "So you say. You may be telling the truth. No way to find out, though – not unless we bring the police in to fingerprint you all." The emphasis he put on "police" and "fingerprint" was admirably subtle, Billy thought. He actually liked Andrew Altı, most of the time. The man had a good, strong brand, and he tended it most carefully. "Of course, once I involve the police, it will be out of my hands. It will be a criminal matter." Again, just the lightest breath of emphasis on "criminal." Billy had to hand it to him.

"It goes without saying that if any of you know how I could resolve this without involving the police, I'd be glad to hear about it. Why don't you take a moment to think about it?"

The boys shuffled their feet. A few of them choked back sobs. Finally, Mitchell McCoy swung an accusing finger at Billy. "He did it! I saw him sneak in with the M-80s, and matches! He told me if I said anything, he'd beat me up again!"

Billy had seen it coming. Mitchell was almost certainly the culprit – every science-fair project he'd ever done had involved blowing something up or setting something on fire. And Mitchell had nursed a grudge for an entire year, ever since Billy had sent him into the mud during an autumn game of tackle-tag, and then sent him back again and again when he tried to rush Billy.

He stared coolly at Andrew Altı. Billy could practically see the wheels turn in his head. Mitchell McCoy's parents were overbearing, with a hands-on approach to Mitchell McCoy's academic career that often sent one or both to Pepsi Elementary on the pretence of helping out with a bake-sale or fun-faire. Fingering Mitchell McCoy for the Incident would surely call down their interminable wrath. Andrew Altı turned his gaze on Billy. "What do you say to this?"

"Consider the source," is what Billy said – it was one of his catch-phrases this term, a tie-in with a kids-only newsfeed. Billy had brought it to Pepsi Elementary, and had spread it beyond the sixth grade into the fifth, with some penetration into the fourth. He liked the sound of it – it was subtly insulting and smart.

Unfortunately, Andrew Altı *was* considering the source – and the source's high-octane-pain-in-the-ass parents. "That's all you have to say, son?" he said, with deadly seriousness.

*Until I speak to my agent, it is,* Billy thought, and kept mum.

Billy's phone was ringing when he let himself into his parents' place. Billy had paged his agent on the way home from school. He was suspended indefinitely, pending a parent-teacher meeting, but that wasn't what bothered Billy. He was worried about his brand-identity, and that meant talking to Bennie Beasely, endorsement broker and personal agent extraordinaire. Bennie Beasely was chipper to a fault, and made sympathetic noises as Billy related the day's events.

"Well!" he said, finally. "What a *pickle!*"

"What are you going to do about it, Bennie Beasely?"

"Well, it's a really sticky sandwich, Billy Bailey. You could deny it all, call for a police investigation. But I can tell you right now, that's going to mean unspun media coverage, and the sponsors aren't going to like that. In the long run, involving the authorities is going to cost you, big.

"On the other hand, you could admit to everything. The sponsors still won't like that – they like their heels sane and under control. But you've got a *relationship* with them, Billy. You're loyal to them, and they're loyal to you. We could probably hit BanginBumpin up for a post-facto fee, you know. That would salvage things somewhat."

Billy had already figured all this out, even the part about going to the fireworks manufacturer for some money, but there was one thing bothering him. "Who pays the ten thou for the damages, Bennie Beasely?"

Bennie Beasely sighed. "I'm afraid you'd be on the hook for that. We'll take it out of the trust. I know it's a tough jellybean, but you're going to have to chew it."

Billy felt the anger bubble up his chest, and he carefully vented some of it. "No. Way. Never. I'm not going to pay a cent. If it takes a police investigation, fine, so be it. If that costs me down the road, I'll suck it up. But I am not paying out ten grand to cover some half-wit stunt Mitchell McCoy pulled. It'll dilute me. It's not my style." He let the anger give his voice a dangerous edge.

"Billy Bailey! Listen to me! I'm not saying this is a good solution – I'm saying it's the better of two terrible ones. I've got another client who just went through a similar situation. He bit the bacon, swallowed his pie, and toughed it out. You can do that, too. I'm telling you this as your friend, son. If you call the cops, you're through as a heel."

Billy felt a lightbulb flash in his head. He pushed the anger all the way down. "I think I'd better talk it over with my parents," he said, calmly.

"That's my tunafish!" Bennie Beasely said. "You do that, and call me back, anytime. You've got my number."

Billy had three hours until his parents, Barbara and Buford Bailey, came home from the office. He spent it putting together a shareholder presentation. He got out some flip-chart paper and a six-pack of colour markers and carefully wrote:

## REBRANDING STRATEGY NOTES

**Problem:** Surplus of amateur heels

**Solution:** Rebrand property – babyface

**Critical Path:**

- 1) Fire Bennie Beasely
- 2) Initiate police investigation
- 3) Buckle down on grades
- 3a) Seek babyface sponsors (other divisions?)

He surveyed it critically, added some colour underlines, then made himself a Skippy SuperChunk on Wonder with Welch's. Then he fleshed out each point, listing pros and cons, using a separate sheet for each, tacking



them to the cork-rail that ringed the family room. He finished up by writing out an agenda, just as Barbara and Buford Bailey came home.

Buford Bailey was Billy's VP Operations, so it fell to him to fire Bennie Beasely. Billy supervised him as he downloaded and filled out the Notice of Intent to Terminate, then faxed it off to Bennie Beasely.

Billy and Barbara Bailey went through his things, packing the slingshots and air rifles and gangsta posters into the FedEx boxes they'd arrived in. They piled up all the war comics and t-shirts with rude slogans and bagged them in Hefty Tie N Tosses. When they were finished, Billy's room was a pristine expanse of empty Ikea Billy shelves, his wardrobe reduced to his church suit and a few pairs of Levi's whose knees he hadn't gotten around to ripping out yet.

They paged Principal Andrew Alty and gave formal notice of their desire to involve the police. Billy listened in on the extension, and was pleased to hear Andrew Alty groaning in frustration.

Billy did four hours of homework, vetted by Barbara and Buford Bailey: Math, Marketing and Society, Geography, and a special report for Consumer Science on the effects of various bottled waters when used in the preparation of Ramen Noodles. Buford dug out an old soft-sided nylon briefcase, and they packed the hard-copy in it, along with a selection of pens and a new, staid, black-and-silver PDA.

Billy and Barbara Bailey went to the Sears Galleria and bought a few outfits, and then he was ready to go back to school.

Billy kept his head up as he left for school the next day, for Barbara and Buford Bailey's benefit. But once he'd turned the corner at the end of the block, he slowed down, dropped his gaze to his loafers, and fretted.

Billy's brand had been established early on, in the first month of kindergarten. He'd been the first in the category – he'd defined "heel" for his classmates. Sure, there'd been heels in the upper grades, but they had no interaction with his class.

Billy had been *the* heel. When others followed the trail he'd blazed, pitching spitwads or putting the boot in during a game of British Bulldog, their behaviour had been compared to Billy's. More than half of the endorsement dollars that flowed into the sixth grade went straight into Billy's trust account.

As well they should. If you were a sixth-grader looking for a risqué t-shirt, nine times out of ten it'd be a shirt that Billy had worn that week. If you went to see a violent movie, it'd be one that Billy had presented a book-report on. If you wanted a PDA with a shotgun mic attachment for cross-playground spying, what better model than the one that Billy could often be seen holding up to his ear, grinning mischievously?

In the minds of the consumers of Pepsi Elementary, Billy owned the word "mischief." The immutable wisdom of the ages said that nothing Billy could do would change that. It would be like trying to sell Evian Brake

Fluid. A brand-killer.

In the searing light of his anger with Andrew Alty and Bennie Beasely and Mitchell McCoy, switching categories had seemed like a bold, sexy move. In the glum winter daylight, it seemed like suicide. *What was he doing?*

As he neared the playground, he saw the earlybirds, babyfaces all, gathered to play their gentle games in the brief calm before the shouting, shoving heels arrived. And he was gobsmacked by revelation.

Billy Bailey, heel, was synonymous with mischief. That would never change. But who wanted to be synonymous with mischief? The world was full of little bastards, getting into their petty troubles. Sponsors couldn't care less about them and their weak, puny brands. At the same time, the few babyfaces remaining in the sixth grade were miserable specimens of the category – snivelling wimps, not child-genius virtuosos. The sponsors barely noticed them, so ineffectual were their brands.

Truth be told, sponsorship was lean in the sixth grade. They were nearly ready for Nintendo Middle School, where they'd be lowly seventh-graders, taking every cue from the wise and savvy eighth-graders, who trembled on the cusp of high-school. In that tough marketplace, heels were jocks or gangstas, the stakes were raised, and real violence was a genuine possibility. The sixth-grade crop of heels was mostly doomed. Billy had gotten out while the getting was good.

Billy's brand had been so strong because he was first in the category. Becoming a babyface, he'd be last in the category – he'd be playing catch-up with the snivelling wimps. He just couldn't stomach the prospect.

But if Billy were to create a *new* category, he would be first to market in it – the automatic leader. And he could leverage the things that had made his brand important to begin with: his native charisma, his understanding of the importance of consistency and caution when managing a brand.

Billy would own a new word in the minds of the consumers at Pepsi Elementary.

That word would be:

*Dissent.*

And so Billy Bailey, heel, gave way to Billy "Bug" Bailey, dissenter.

His first sponsor came on-board a week later.

The promised criminal investigation had fizzled quietly after a fingerprinting session and an intense series of meetings between Principal Andrew Alty and Mitchell McCoy's overbearing parental units. And Billy "Bug" Bailey had attended five days of classes without a single logomark, a single brand, or a single label on his person.

He turned in his homework impeccably and on-time, but he refused to incorporate any of the school's approved sponsors into his personal curriculum. His assignments contained no registered trademarks. And they were signed *Bug Bailey*.

In the playground, Bug's new brand met with a great

deal of consumer resistance. Mitchell McCoy confronted him during a game of tackle-tag, dropping Billy as he charged for the home-base at the swing-set.

"Got you!" he hissed through clenched teeth. He had a heavy-metal t-shirt on, with more umlauts than the entire Ring Cycle; a TimePuker watch on a studded bracelet; and Doc Marten's ButtKicker 2000s, with the plated shin-guards. "You beetle!"

Bug wriggled from beneath him, stood and dusted himself off. "Beetle?" he said, wondering if it was a new insult he'd missed.

"Bug, beetle, what's the difference? Either way, you're something disgusting that I squish."

Bug cocked an eyebrow. "The Doc Marten's are a bad idea," he said, off-hand. "Too much line-extension, they've weakened the brand. That's what I told them when they offered me a pair." Of course, no one had ever offered Mitchell McCoy anything – he always paid.

"Bug!" Mitchell McCoy shouted. He looked around to make sure that any heels in range heard him. "Bug!"

Bug kept his cool, confident that Mitchell McCoy couldn't muster the support of any of the heels on the playground. And he was right. The others looked a little embarrassed and moved off. Panic flashed in Mitchell McCoy's eyes.

He charged.

Bug stood perfectly still, let Mitchell McCoy jump on him, force him to the ground. Bug twisted to shield his groin and face, but Mitchell McCoy managed to open a cut over his left eyebrow before a teacher broke it up.

He spent the rest of the day in class, soaking up the blood with one of the janitor's shop rags: he refused to wear the Band-Aids the school nurse had offered him. Mitchell McCoy's parents descended on the principal's office like kingfishers, and left with Mitchell McCoy on a two-week suspension.

When Bug left the schoolyard, a limo was waiting for him.

"Billy, Jesus, you look like you've been in a war," is what Ronnie Ryan, the rep from Polygram, said as Bug approached the limo. Ronnie Ryan had always been good for a half-dozen new CDs every week, gangsta rap and narco-mariachi dance stuff. But they had communicated through Bennie, mostly, never this flashy limousine service.

"Can I give you a ride?" Ronnie Ryan asked.

"Sure," Bug said, and got in the limo.

Ronnie Ryan had an intense cell-phone conversation as they were pulling out, but once they'd hit the highway, he rang off and gave Billy a great big smile. Ronnie Ryan had always reminded Billy of a second-grade heel, more high-strung than mean, with his expensive brand-new casual clothes and his artfully mussed hair.

"I wanted to make a quick stop on the way, I hope you don't mind," Ronnie Ryan said. "I think you'll be interested."

Bug knew that Ronnie Ryan knew that Bug wasn't a heel any longer. He was intrigued by whatever it was that Ronnie Ryan thought would tempt him, but cool

enough not to show it. He took a Yoo-Hoo from the mini-bar and settled back for the ride.

They pulled up in front of a warehouse whose broken windows leered at him. From within, he heard wailing guitars and hoarse singing. Ronnie Ryan held the door open for him. "You're going to love these guys," he said.

The band was called Honey-Roasted Landlords. Three B.Comm. grads – a guitar, a bass and a drum-kit. They wore faded track-pants and plain white t-shirts with off-brand tennis shoes. They weren't bad.

"I thought you'd like them," Ronnie Ryan said, after they'd finished rehearsing. "We're releasing them on our bootleg label, photocopied inserts, home-toasted CDs. They're testing very high in the 11-16 market."

Bug nodded sagely. "My rate has doubled," he said, as off-handedly as he could manage.

Ronnie Ryan swallowed. Bug held his gaze. When you focus a brand down, you end up with a premium product. Rolex makes nothing but watches, and they cost the world; Matsushita makes everything from stereos to space stations, and they have to sell on price, incentives and rebates. Bug knew which camp he was in.

Ronnie Ryan nodded, finally. The B.Com. with the guitar watched the proceedings with undisguised interest. He snapped Billy a nod that was a salute, one artist to another.

"Let's get you home, huh?" Ronnie Ryan said.

Things were shaky, that first month, but by the end of it, he had a solid seven sponsors lined up, all at double his old rate. He wore "homemade" band-shirts; did Music Appreciation reports on "indie" singles he downloaded from "pirate" sites; wore street-vendor styles that had been mass-produced – *sans* label – by DKNY's Chechen facility.

The kids on the playground spent the first week staring in shock; the second, shaking their heads in pity; the third, covertly studying him; and by the fourth, it seemed like a couple were ready to follow his lead. The umlauts dwindled, the hand-drawn t-shirts multiplied. Bug's sponsors were delighted.

Bug knew that it wasn't enough, though. He needed to promote more than himself; he needed to promote the category, to bring some of the stronger heel brands into the fold, to grow the field. Sure, it might decrease his market-share, but it would increase the overall size of the market.

He had to pick his competition.

Mitchell McCoy came off his two-week suspension even more hostile to Bug. He spent the entire morning glaring at Bug while the teacher moused through a PepsiOne multimedia on the Civil War.

Bug made a note of his reaction. He liked to know where he stood. And more and more, it seemed that he stood somewhere very fine indeed. He tried to picture the class seen from overhead, and saw the homemade t-shirts clustered densely around his desk and then

thinning in proportion to the distance from it. He could almost see his influence rippling outwards.

Mitchell McCoy sat in the opposite corner of the room, one more black speedmetal t-shirt inside a knot of the same. Bug cocked his head at him and pondered until the recess bell rang.

On the schoolyard, he deliberately distanced himself from the other dissenters, sitting in the shelter of an emergency exit, tapping a game of solitaire on his new PDA, which he'd decorated with "underground" stickers for "indie" cartoon shows. He peeked up occasionally and watched Mitchell McCoy make his way across the playground to him. He suppressed a grin. This had all started when Mitchell McCoy hadn't had the sense to stay down in a game of tackle-tag, and Mitchell McCoy hadn't learned a thing.

He pretended not to notice Mitchell McCoy's approach, but peripherally watched the oxblood-coloured ButtKicker 2000s crunch towards him, kick his PDA into the sky.

"Nice shirt, Bug!"

Bug simulated a cringe. "Why can't you just leave me alone, Mitchell McCoy?" he whined.

Mitchell McCoy grinned wolfishly. "Why can't you weave me awone?" he said, in a baby-voice. "Because I don't like you, Bug. You think you're so great –"

"You're just jealous because you don't have any endorsement deals," Bug said, with a calculated amount of petulance.

Mitchell McCoy purpled. "Oh yeah, and I suppose you're just rolling in it these days, with crap like that shirt and those shoes and those nasty CDs you keep bringing in..." He trailed off, comprehension crawling with glacial slowness across his face. "That's it! You've got deals with these guys! Independent, my butt!"

"No I don't," Bug said, too quickly.

"Oh yes you do! Wait'll I tell everyone! You're a dead man, Bug." Mitchell McCoy rubbed his hands and did a little ButtKicker 2000 dance.

"Don't!" Bug said. "Please! I'll do anything." Bug consciously didn't hold his breath, tried to play the part to its utmost. This was the moment of truth.

"What can you do?"

"Well, I could hook you up with my sponsors," Bug said, forcing misery into his voice. "Then you'd be in on it, too."

"What makes you think I'd *want* to endorse any of your low-rent sponsors, Bug?"

"How else are you going to pay for the girl's toilet?" Bug wondered if he was showing too much premeditation, but Mitchell McCoy was hooked.

"How do I know they'll want to sign me?" he asked, almost drooling.

"I'll tell them. They'll consider the source."

"It's a deal," Mitchell McCoy said. "I'll meet you at the back gate after school." He walked away, pausing to crush Bug's PDA underfoot.

They met Ronnie Ryan in an alley a block from the school. Once they were in the limo, Bug dropped the

pretence that he was scared of Mitchell McCoy. He and Ronnie Ryan tag-teamed Mitchell McCoy, giving him pointers on dress, speech, comportment and behaviour. Mitchell McCoy's eyes, already bugged out from the moment he'd seen the stretch limo, grew wider with every moment, and he nodded unconsciously as they tore apart his brand.

Finally, Ronnie Ryan passed him a neatly folded bundle: non-name sneakers, homemade CDs, track-pants, a t-shirt with Honey-Roasted Landlord written in Magic Marker. He dug out a Hefty Tie N Toss and shook it open. "Toss everything in," he commanded. "The boots, the shirt, anything in your pockets. You're not a heel any more."

Bug and Ronnie Ryan politely turned their heads while Mitchell McCoy changed. Ronnie Ryan had him sign a nondisclosure and a noncompete, then sent him packing.

"You're sure about this?" he asked Bug once they were alone.

"I'm growing the category," Bug said. "It's the natural next-step."

"But that kid –" Ronnie Ryan gave a dramatic shudder. "Ugh."

"Don't worry about it," Bug said. "I'll make sure he does his part. He's the perfect number-two brand – dumb and easy to figure out."

"Take this, will you?" Ronnie Ryan said, holding out the Tie N Toss. "I can't even bear to hold it."

Mitchell McCoy was a loser. Bug knew that. But he'd underestimated how much of a loser he was. When he dumped out the Tie N Toss in his bedroom that night, he nearly laughed out loud.

Mitchell McCoy's pockets had been filled with Bang-inBumpin M-80s. Some people never learn.

Bug got a couple of Zip-Loc bags from the kitchen and put them on like gloves. He picked up the M-80s and carefully slipped them into his pocket.

He set the alarm for 7AM, so that he could get to school nice and early. Early enough to drop the M-80s – covered in Mitchell McCoy's fingerprints – down the newly rebuilt girls' toilets.

As he nestled under the covers, he felt a tremor of doubt. He wasn't a heel any more, so wasn't setting up Mitchell McCoy off-strategy?

He pondered it while sleep overtook him, and in the morning he knew the answer.

Billy "Bug" Bailey could act like a heel if he wanted to. He was a category-killer.

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**Cory Doctorow**, who says he is remotely related to the well-known American novelist E. L. Doctorow, is a rising name in Canadian sf. Over the past two or three years, his stories have appeared in the U.S. magazines *Amazing*, *Asimov's SF* and *Science Fiction Age*, and in various Canadian venues. A couple have been reprinted in the best-of-the-year anthologies edited by Gardner Dozois and David Hartwell. He lives in Toronto, and the above is his first contribution to *Interzone*.



## ANSIBLE LINK



## DAVID LANGFORD

Once again the Clarke Award presentation took place in the Science Museum, with much alcohol sloshing around. This year's laureate was Bruce Sterling, for his novel *Distraction*. 1999 winner Tricia Sullivan – looking very much happier than when accepting her own Clarke – presented the traditional bookend and £1,000 cheque to a Sterling impersonator closely resembling Orion boss Malcolm Edwards.

## HEROES AND VILLAINS

**Greg Egan** the Kurd Lasswitz Prize for *Distress*, as 1999's best foreign novel in German translation published, won. (Bernhard Kempen topped the Best Translation category for his efforts on the same book.)

**George Hay**, were he still with us, would be hugely tickled by the European Space Agency's new project to exploit ideas from sf. This was a long-term vision of George's, and one of his original aims for the SF Foundation (redirected by other hands towards "respectable" sf criticism).

**Frank Herbert**, whose recent activities were thought confined to steady subterranean rotation after *Dune: House Atreides*, popped up unexpectedly with a cover endorsement – "Superb detail... shudderingly believable" – of the Niven/Pournelle *The Burning City* (Orbit, 2000).

**Diana Wynne Jones**, after being sought by a well-known sf fan with such urgency that she'd hoped for something to her advantage, fumed: "He wants me to put him in touch with J. K. Rowling!!!!"

**Terry Pratchett** rolled his eyes skyward at the *Times* report of his planning application for a garden observatory with "4.5 metre" telescope: "The paper you can trust. Jeez. From those wonderful people who

gave you the silicone chip. I don't think the size of the scope (a modest 8" mirror) was ever mentioned in the application. Unlike a *Times* journalist, your readers will of course spot that 4.5 metres would make me the owner of a scope only marginally smaller than the big one at Mt Palomar..."

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**Publishers and Sinners.** *Science Fiction Chronicle* has been bought by Warren Lapine's DNA Publications. Former publisher Andrew I. Porter continues as News Editor, now able to focus on actual news while DNA minions do the clogging paperwork that had caused alarming gaps between past "monthly" issues. Meanwhile *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*, having survived its founder's death by several months, was reportedly to fold at issue 50.

**Nebulas.** Novel: Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Talents*. Novella: Ted Chiang, "Story of Your Life." Novellette: Mary A. Turzillo, "Mars Is No Place for Children." Short: Leslie What, "The Cost of Doing Business." Script: *The Sixth Sense*, M. Night Shyamalan. Author Emeritus: Daniel Keyes. Grand Master (as previously announced): Brian Aldiss.

**Thogissimus.** It's always thrilling to discover an entire book pervaded with the aura of Thog. One such is *Future Tense* (1987) by Desmond Wilcox, a feast of futuristic spelling which opens: "in richblu drume Diplomatic Oficer Kunt arives in Luria at the Wesleyan embassy where safron and beryl tints prevail + with more discretion than melodius panolply he travels in his aureolin autobar from the adjacent prome bringing with him his companion astals + he is welsuited to his invidius ocupation = his amenabl body is host to an unctuously pleasing disposition +" Besides euphonious character names, Wilcox is ever-inventive in ways to avoid that boring verb "said." From a three-page passage picked at random: "Lere taunts... Hotus hyperbolizes... Lere teases with agravating reluctance... Lere obstreperusly vacilates... Hotus inveighs... Lere calously vituperates... Lere tantalizes... Lere embraces... Bude mopes... Lere ineptly soothes... Lere umbrageously supports... Gune ponders with uplifted eyes and suspicion of deprivation... Hotus expatiates... Clut disfavors... Hotus jeeringly provokes... Clut sapiently allows... Gune hapily afirms... Hotus brilliantly quashes... Lere darkly chastizes... Lere cantankerously dehorts..." Enough, enough.

**R.I.P.** *Andrew Faulds*, who played sf hero Jet Morgan in Charles Chilton's three *Journey Into Space* series (BBC

Radio 1954-1960), was reported in June as having died aged 77. *Sir John Gielgud* (1904-2000), celebrated actor, died on 22 May aged 96. His best-known fantastic movie role was as Shakespeare's mage in *Prospero's Books* (1991). *Dick Sprang* (1915-2000), popular 1950s *Batman* comics artist, died on 10 May. *Rex Vinson* (1935-2000), UK art teacher who as Vincent King wrote four sf novels 1969-1976 (*Light a Last Candle*, *Another End*, *Candy Man*, *Time Snake* and *Superclown*), died in late May aged 64.

**I Dreamt I Dwelt In Marble Halls.** Writers admitted to the US "SF & Fantasy Hall of Fame" this year: Poul Anderson, Gordon R. Dickson, and (posthumously) Theodore Sturgeon and Eric Frank Russell.

**UK in 2005?** There's a new bid to bring the World SF Convention back to Britain. Possible sites are few: after eliminating Cardiff (too few beds), the Birmingham NEC (too expensive) and Brighton (convention centre likely to be demolished for rebuilding circa 2002), what remains is the venue of the curate's-egg 1995 Worldcon: Glasgow. Be still, my beating heart. SAE for information to 379 Myrtle Rd, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

**International Horror Guild Awards** for 1999 novels went to Stewart O'Nan's *A Prayer for the Dying* and, as best first novel, Michael Cisco's *The Divinity Student*.

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Dept of Carnivorous Weather*. "Rain came as a wet drizzle that clings to your face like a hungry leech fighting to hang on, only to slip down over the scars and dive into the abyss of excrement and refuse at your feet." (Bradley Snow, *Andy*, 1990) "They clung to her, those eyes, but again, no one could reasonably have faulted that." (David Weber, *Ashes of Victory*, 2000) *Dept of Suggestive Motor Launches*. "Discords of remote activity rose above the more intimate throbbing of our screw." (Sax Rohmer, *The Mystery of Dr Fu Manchu*, 1913) *Dept of Good Moods*. "It was as if her insides put italics on the feeling of superb." (Stanley Crouch, *Don't the Moon Look Lonesome*, 2000) *Dept of Planetary Physics*. With a Velikovskian doomsday impact expected in mere hours, our hero naturally has a nice snooze and wakes to find the morning mysteriously dark: "Switching on the searchlight, Joseph Brock saw, caught in its brilliant beam, Jupiter. It was hovering a few thousand miles up. He had reckoned that the planet would come with an extra rush as it drew within the gravity of the Earth, or vice-versa. But the gravities of both planets seemed ineffective." (Desmond Wilcox, *Into Existence*, 1941)

# The Dreamlode

*John Meaney*

<<Whorl one whorl one whorl two>> – the flux beat incessantly – <<whorl three whorl five whorl eight>>

Harij, standing in the doorway's arch, shook his head. Sad teal-green patches flitted across his glistening nacreous skin.

*How can she stand it?*

There were eight of them: all children, thoughts monotonous, rocking back and forth while the ellipsoid chamber rippled with diffractive emerald and rose, reacting to the reinforced 'cast.

<<fifty-five whorl eighty-nine whorl one hundred forty-four>>

Ilara, silver-skinned, clad in a plain ochre inmate's tunic, moved metronome-wise in time with the others, unaware of Harij's presence.

*Why was she born like this, and not me?*

Where his shoulder nearly touched the packed-sand wall, Harij's skin was already growing numb, affected by the absorption. He would have to go.

The children's skins glinted, unnaturally bright.

<<Ilara>> he 'cast softly, expecting no reply.

Chant-like, the children's flux-beat continued, oblivious to everything but their own resonance.

An elegant, long-fingered hand touched Harij's bare arm, and he jumped.

<<Peace, young Harij.>> Mistress Zehra's flux was controlled and even; her skin was cream, mottled with pale blue mandelbrotten. <<Perhaps that's enough for one night.>>

<<I know.>> Harij's skin darkened sombrely.

<<Almost mealtime.>>

Harij knew what that meant. Any delay, any departure from the hospice routine, and Ilara would end up banging her head against the wall, over and over, until some internal flux-loop of the mind untangled itself.

And the other inmates were just as bad.

<<I should go,>> he 'cast.

<<But you'll be back nextnight? At mid-dark?>>

<<Yes, ma'am,>> Harij replied.

<<Good.>> *[[Not like his parents.]]*

Had she meant him to catch that last thought?

Two aides – frowning in concentration: guarding against the children's flux – were hauling in the food-sled. Harij looked once more at Ilara, shook his head, touched finger to forehead in salute to Mistress Zehra, and turned to go.

<<Get a good day's sleep,>> she 'cast after him. <<You're looking tired.>>

<<I will.>>

But he wouldn't.

For sleep might bring the dreaming.

Beating softly, the aurora: pulsing beneath the tall cavern ceiling, diminishing now as the townsfolk began to settle down to sleep. Outside, beyond the nestled shell-like domes, it must be nearly dayfall.

The slope was grey, broken scree.

It led up the cavern's wall, to the twisted tunnel which led outside.

*I've done my assignment,* Harij thought. *The best*

crystal I've ever resolved.

Nothing to do but go home, and try to sleep.

Following the twisted trail, leaving the triple-shelled hospice behind him, Harij walked slowly, awkwardly. He really should get back home, but he knew what awaited: Mother, snoring in her weaving-frame after one-too-many goblets of triplum wine; no Father, for he would be coaxing a final batch of liquid synthshell from the factochamber's stalacteats.

No one to miss Harij, if he was gone.

Hard, uneven stone beneath his sandals.

Vortices, tugging –

But the flux was trapped deep inside the rock, and he clambered past, through the narrow convoluted tunnel, as sharp desert scents floated into his awareness, and the dry air beckoned him.

Outside.

Clean air, vertiginous open space.

On the dusty ledge, back against solid stone – already feeling warm, through his tunic's rough fabric – Harij looked out over the canyon.

Grey-purple mesa, the level horizon beyond.

Above, the silver/black globe of Magnus, hanging high; lower, near the horizon, stars dimming as pre-dawn fingerpainted the sky in greens and blues.

Away from the township's cavern, he suddenly missed the background sensations which normally went unnoticed: the cyanic tang of sporegarden and threadpool, the jangling of inductive airborne motes.

The motes out here drifted peacefully.

Below the ledge, the canyon was purple, dark. Over its depths, a flock of triblades swooped – dodging to avoid a fragile, floating hexarray – while glimmercrawls drew golden threads across sheer rockface.

Carefully, Harij sat down on the ledge.

Folding his legs into lotus, tugging his tunic comfortably into place, he settled down and slowly exhaled –

There.

Movement...

For a moment, squinting against the growing light, he thought it might be illusion. But – No, there it was again. On the far mesa, the tiny moving figure... of a man.

In the open, this close to burning day?

Either madness, or...

A Seeker.

Could it be?

But the figure had disappeared.

Harij watched, until his skin began to prickle uncomfortably and half of the stars had faded from the sky – only Magnus' sphere remained majestic, above – but there was no more sign of the man. Had Harij imagined it?

There was an old story – [[I Have Sought]] – and it had always enthralled him. It was his most-read crystal.

But a spin-glass energy-Hamiltonian, Harij thought, is entirely analogous to a fitness-landscape allele-suitability matrix where mutated genes are epistatically interdependent according to a well-defined –

What was he thinking?

An equation shimmered in his mind, clarifying the model – But then it started to twist apart, just as its strangeness began to dawn on Harij.

An Idea!

– statistically model as random fluctuation –

It must be. He knew nothing of this strange biomaths.

Trying to hold onto the thought, knowing the Idea must not escape, Harij awkwardly pulled himself to his feet.

Beyond, the canyon remained a shadowed abyss.

Losing it...

<<NO!>>

But it slipped beyond his grasp.

<<No, please...>>

He sensed the Idea drifting out above the sheer drop, but there was nothing he could do.

<<Please come back.>>

Unheeding, tumbling lazily in accord with its inner dynamics, the Idea floated out across the depths, receding farther and farther as its flux diminished with distance, and was gone.

Next night, early: in the school quadrangle, before first class.

<<Look what they're doing!>>

A nine-winged shape swooped by overhead.

<<You're disgusting, Lintraj.>>

But all of the children watched as the mating triplet arced up towards the cavern ceiling, then shot out of sight.

<<Oh, boys.>> It was Mistress Ahn, standing by a colonnade, among the girls. <<What are you up to?>>

Harij's skin blotted with purple embarrassment, but some of the other boys sniggered.

<<Triblades,>> 'cast Lintraj. <<They were mating, mistress!>>

<<Don't you think>> – Mistress Ahn's skin glowed cream and silver – <<about anything other than sex, Lintraj?>>

Most of the children held their breath. Only Mistress Ahn, among all the teachers, would make such a remark.

Lintraj: <<Don't you, mistress?>>

For a moment, they were all shocked: from the swirling ripples of anxious white across his skin, even Lintraj thought he had gone too far. But then Mistress Ahn's sudden pulse of amusement swept across them, and everyone relaxed.

[[Do you wonder,]] Mistress Ahn half-thought, half-'cast, as they all filed inside, [[why we ourselves have only two genders? Does it never seem strange to you?]]

Entering the classroom, Harij noticed a tall, straight-backed figure at the corridor's end. It was Mother Zil-Granria, most senior of the teaching adepts, and she was staring at Mistress Ahn with contemptuous disapproval.

Viltril, the class swot, led the imaging: [[My Family]] as relationship-map, tinged with the warm, loving influence of his parents.

Not like mine. Harij kept his thought private.

Cross-legged, seated on a cushion like the others, he



closed his eyes.

With the full class's support, all 20 of them, Viltril brought the imagefield into sharp focus, until its clarity became almost painful, and Mistress Ahn led them carefully through the wind-down phase, as their concentrated flux slowly dissipated, harmlessly resonated, and was gone.

<<Perhaps>> – there were odd resonances to Mistress Ahn's 'cast – <<I would've made a good Singer, eh?>>

But she was a brilliant teacher. Everyone thought so – Harij wondered if Mother Zil-Granria was causing problems for Mistress Ahn; they obviously did not get on.

<<And you, Viltril.>> Mistress Ahn focused her attention on the boy. <<What do you want to be when you're older?>>

A pause, then a low-intensity imagefield, mapping out a career: lattice-tech apprentice, induction modifier, pulse-hall supervisor.

<<Neatly planned, at least.>> Was that disappointment tinging her flux? <<What about you, Harij?>>

The force of her gaze – silver-filmed eyes, in that perfect ivory-and-blue face – stunned him momentarily, and confused patches of many hues pulsed across his skin.

<<A... Seeker, mistress.>>

No!

But it was too late: he'd said it.

And all around him, amusement heterodyned into an undercurrent, overlaid with ill-concealed scorn:

[[A runt like you?]]

[[...does he think he is? Poor little...]]

[[Him? Outside?]]

[[Seeker!]]

[[...sister... can't even find her own mind!]]

Trembling, Harij got to his feet.

<<No, Harij.>>

But he backed away from Mistress Ahn.

<<Perhaps he's going Seeking, mistress.>> Lintraj, bold as ever.

As Mistress Ahn turned her fury on Lintraj, Harij turned and ran.

Behind him, the group flux dissolved into chaotic uproar.

There was no punishment. Soon after he ran out into the quadrangle, a senior monitor span the yard-coils, 'casting the end-of-class pulse, and everyone spilled out into the corridors for the break between sessions.

No one 'cast directly to Harij for the rest of the school-night.

At night's end, after visiting Ilara at the hospice, he sat on a ledge high up the cavern wall. Below, the township was a neatly organic pattern of shell-domes, laid out in interlocking spirals across the vast floor.

He closed his eyes, remembering the Seeker's tales from [[I Have Sought]], the strange legends composed of captured half-Ideas, recast into narrative structures of wild vividness.

*I can find it for her.*

No one else had such an affinity for the tales, the ability to lose themselves in fluxfield the way Harij

could. He could feel their reality –

*I can do it.*

Carefully, he began to make his plans.

It took a ninenight of planning, but eventually he was ready.

No daywatchmen guarded the small tunnel which led to the outside ledge – his ledge – and, as for the hospice... At this time, only a couple of daytime shift-workers were there, overseeing 30 inmates, adults and children.

And the wards' lock-laminae could be degaussed from the outside: they were designed only to keep people in.

Down below – he looked at the tiny shell-domes, then turned away, vision blurring – Mother and Father were at home, asleep in separate chambers.

*I'm coming, Ilara.*

Laminae unfolded at his approach.

No tantrums.

Following meekly, her hand in his, Ilara walked head down. Her skin was a blank silvery grey.

[[Everything's fine.]] Harij kept his flux low, barely 'casting. [[It's OK, Ilara. We're all right.]]

They passed a locked single chamber.

<<...is not is not is not is not...>>

The inmate was a man, Legil: about the same age as Father. His flux leaked out past the shielding.

[[It's OK, Ilara.]] But Harij hurried a little, before she could pick up Legil's flux-rhythm and react.

He took her along a service corridor, sensing the two overseers' distant conversation, then led Ilara outside, onto the broken stone trail which meandered along the cavern wall.

Below the cavern ceiling, the aurora shimmered with wonderful colours.

Ilara kept her eyes down as they walked.

And the burning began.

From the ledge overlooking the canyon, Harij fetched the heavy bag he had hidden. Too heavy: almost immediately, the shoulder straps began to dig through his light tunic.

<<Come on, Ilara.>>

Among the sweetmilk sacettes and algal wafer, he had packed globules of protective exudate from the public stalacteats; but for now, they had to keep moving.

From the ledge, they climbed a steep trail. Finally, they came out onto flat stone: mesa, broken only by a tall natural pinkstone pillar – like a giant's gnarled, upraised finger – standing nearby.

Dizziness, striking suddenly.

*I... don't...*

Pulling.

*...going...*

Pulling on his hand.

*...blank, twisted...*

And then he was past the stone pillar, and Ilara, her head down as always, was tugging him away from the embedded vortices.

[[And you're supposed to be the stupid one.]]

Ilara made no reply.

But, as they walked onwards, she made no move to remove her hand from his grasp.

No complaint, even as the scorching day laced fiery pain across their burnished skins.

It might have been the first thousand primes.

<<...one and three and five and seven...>>

But he could not keep track of her monotonous counting; at some point, she would start at one again, and the cycle would continue.

<<Come on, Ilara.>>

Yet she was walking with him, and causing no trouble. What more could he expect from her?

The white sun burned; the stone was hot even through their sandals. Still, they plodded on.

In a small rift, Harij found a vortex-free overhang: a shelter, where they could sleep for the second half of the day. Settling in, Ilara gave no reaction as he rubbed a protective exudate-globule across her skin, and made her sip some. When he applied the stuff to himself, it felt cool and sticky. Faintly herbal scent; not too pleasant.

When he slept, the familiar dream came: *[[endless searching, snarling demons behind, and the plaintive 'casts of children, lost in the endless day.]]*

He awoke to whimpering flux. Ilara, thumb in mouth, rocking back and forth on the spot.

But cool night had fallen, the twin gibbous lights of Minor and Minimus just above the dark horizon, Magnus in full black-and-silver glory above.

Harij opened his pack, pulled out a sacette...

Tantrum.

It had to happen.

And, as she tried to beat herself senseless against the overhang, Harij could do nothing but place his hand between her forehead and the rock, cushioning the blow. He crouched there, trembling with tension at the awkward position, as she pounded her head against his palm – which hurt – over and over until something shifted in her mind, and she stopped.

Finally, she ate breakfast with him, despite the unfamiliar surroundings and the change of menu. And when he hoisted the pack and took her hand, she walked on with him.

<<Good girl,>> he 'cast.

No reply.

By the fifth night, the sweetmilk was gone, and only a handful of algal flakes remained.

Five whole nights.

The worst part was, the smaller the portions, the less Ilara reacted: after they had squeezed the last few drops of sweetmilk from the final sacette, she had waited passively until Harij led her onwards once more.

Every step was instantiated in pain; his whole body was a twisted nest of agony.

Past the jagged crevasse...

*It must be right.*

Although it was not quite like the image from *[[I Have Sought]]*, it must be the same feature. Just a distortion,

from the storytellers' flux-shift. And it was the right legend: those tales were buried deeply in Harij's mind.

If he was wrong, he had killed Ilara, and himself.

But their nacreous skins were flaked and gouged, despite the exudate, and both of them were reduced to shuffling forwards: pain constant in their legs, feet burning, vision blurred, dry throats swollen with thirst. He could not begin to estimate how far they had walked in five nights, sometimes travelling into the blazing day.

Everything burned...

A path led downwards.

Slowly, on trembling legs, they descended.

*Here.*

Blank rockface.

*The legend...*

He squinted, as though to sharpen the image in his mind. Forward, just as in the tale, around an outcrop draped with glimmercrawls' golden threads –

*Here.*

Blank rockface.

Only orange/brown stone, impervious, lay before them.

*It should be here.*

He sank down on the hot, broken ground, his vision flaming with orange, and all his strength dissipated like a frostworm's nightnest beneath the sunrise.

*[[It should be here.]]*

He had led Ilara – she trusting, uncomplaining – to her death.

Then... nothing.

**\*\*IT'S ALL RIGHT, HARIJ.\*\***

The flux was strong, beating through his torpor.

**\*\*WE'RE HERE. AT THE DREAMLODE.\*\***

Sharp taste upon his lips.

A dream-memory, of her hands dragging him across painfully uneven ground...

Moisture on his tongue.

**\*\*WAKE UP, BROTHER. YOU'VE DONE IT. WE WERE ALMOST THERE.\*\***

He squinted, head lolling. *[[What?...]]*

Their surroundings were cool, a shadowed cave –

**\*\*HERE.\*\***

– and a small figure crouched near the rear, while pulse waves washed and crashed through the glistening mineral seams above her head.

<Ilara?>>

He forced himself up, so that he was sitting against the hard cave wall.

Frown: **\*\*I GUESS SO.\*\***

Harij shook his head.

<<This is the dreamlode?>>

**\*\*FROM LEGEND.\*\*** Ilara made a small movement.  
**\*\*THERE WAS TRUTH, IN THE OLD TALES.\*\***

<<I didn't – >> He stopped, stared at her, more awake now. <<Is that really you, Ilara?>>

Ripples of light, beating in time with the pulsing flux.

**\*\*THERE'S SO MUCH HERE... RESONANCES, SNAGGED IDEA-FRAGMENTS, INTACT COMPLEXES. SO MUCH.\*\***

There were some hexagonal purple leaves beside Harij. He picked one up, bit into the pulp. Sweet and

sharp.

As relief flooded through him, he asked: <<Were you always like this, Ilara? Inside, I mean. Bottled up.>>

A pause.

**\*\*PERHAPS... OR PERHAPS NOT. IT'S HARD TO TELL.\*\***

<<Trapped?>> Harij looked away. <<I was never sure.>>

**\*\*TRAPPED... \*\***

Ilara shifted position again.

**\*\*YES. THAT'S A CONCEPT WE UNDERSTAND.\*\***

Halfway through chewing a leaf, Harij stopped. Though the air remained warm, an instant blue chill swept across his flaking skin.

<<What do you mean... 'we' understand?>>

**\*\*AH... IDENTITY IS SUCH A FRAGILE CONCEIT, DON'T YOU THINK? \*\***

Swallowing, Harij forced himself to his feet.

<<But we did it. You're cured!>>

For a moment, the cave's flux levels dimmed.

Then Ilara pointed at the three purple leaves which remained on the ground.

**\*\*THAT IS ALL WE HAVE, UNTIL THE SPIKER REGROWS.\*\***

Harij shook his head. <<I don't understand. Surely we can>>

Again the clear 'cast: **\*\*DIDN'T YOU KNOW, BROTHER? MY BODY CAN NEVER LEAVE HERE. NOT NOW.\*\***

The whole world seemed to tip away from him.

<<No! You can't>>

But he stopped then, for her meaning was clear.

**\*\*YOU MUST RETURN ALONE. \*\***

And then, for the first time, as she stepped from the shadows, a wonderful thing happened.

Ilara smiled.

The journey back: an awful dream.

Strange nights, fiery days.

No supplies: he left the leaves at the dreamlode, knowing they would not last long. That Ilara's time, at least as a corporeal entity, was almost through.

Swollen tongue, closing his throat so that his breath wheezed.

He should have died.

In his delirium, he knew little of what was happening, in which direction he was staggering... but, when he awoke with the dusk, there was a small sac, bulging with glucofluid, and some dry carbfingers, lying on the ground beside him.

He had no strength to 'cast his thanks. Besides, the Seeker was probably long gone.

Ambrosial, the fluid hurt his throat, but he drank greedily until commonsense forced him to stop. Then he calmed down, oriented himself by star positions and the distant black sliver of the canyon which led home, gathered up his new supplies, and walked on.

Automaton-like.

Not caring about the pain. Not thinking about the punishment which awaited him.

Just walking.

The familiar ledge, the twisting tunnel down which he

staggered, and the sudden sight which burst upon him: home, the township nestling on the cavern floor, its shell-domes fragile and beautiful, and quite unchanged.

But there were daywatchmen on duty, with brassards of office, and they placed Harij in custody, led him down and left him in a triple-laminated dead-chamber which dampened flux to nothing. With food and drink to hand: they were efficient, not cruel.

And then the tribunal.

Mother Zil-Granria convened, presiding; on each side of her, two counsellors sat on bright, strongly patterned cushions. At the rear, three proctors stood, dense-field ferrobars in their gauntleted hands.

There were other onlookers, Mistress Ahn included, but not his parents: they were specifically excluded.

*Ilara didn't talk about them*, Harij realized. *Not once, after she gained her true mind.*

It had always been up to him to look after her.

<<...abduction, wilful negligence, and murder. How do you plead?>>

It was Mother Zil-Granria, her 'cast powerful and raw. Strange resonances circulated the shining chamber's walls.

Harij swallowed.

Then, summoning his strength – and it seemed, for a moment, that Mistress Ahn smiled encouragement – he related their journey, their discovery of the dreamlode.

<<And finally...>> He stopped.

Disbelief had faded, but the onlookers' hostility remained.

<<This was Ilara's last gift.>>

And then he Sang.

It spoke of desert and life, of centuries passing: of awareness, and beauty. Even of death.

Peace among the harsh wastes; rationality contemplating, exploring by reason since movement was impossible. Existence beyond existence.

Vistas of thought...

Triumph, sharing her Song with her people, even as Ilara's body died.

Flux whispered, dwindled, dissolved.

To silence.

When Ilara's Song had faded away, Mother Zil-Granria looked to her counsellors, then bowed her head low –

<<NO!>> Mistress Ahn's desperate 'cast, swamped as high-hysteresis ferrobars moved, pulsing, and proctors caught her arms. <<Harij... Be strong.>>

– and delivered her verdict.

<<Mind-death.>>

Black ripples, spirals, moved slowly across her skin.

<<And discard the remains.>>

Night was drawing to a close when they hauled him from the cavern, via a shaft he had not seen before. He felt numb inside, and wondered why Mother and Father had not finally come, just to see him now the tribunal was over. Just one last time...



Proctors and counsellors, all clad in heavy silver robes, protective hoods drawn forwards, led him across the mesa. Faint scents of hexarrays upon the cool air.

*Ilara. Are you happy, my sister?*

Harij hoped that he was right, had done the right thing. But how could he know for sure?

Her final Song remained in his mind. It replayed, softly, deep inside him, even as the proctors took him to the pinkstone pillar and bound him with unbreakable cords.

*It hurts...*

Strong vortices, trapped inside the stone pillar, tore away his thoughts.

<<It hurts!>>

But the proctors and counsellors, despite their shielded robes, were hurrying away from the mind-destroying flux.

*I'm going mad.*

Lashed against the pillar, sere mesa before him, Harij could do nothing but close his eyes against the burgeoning dawn, and the tides which tugged at his soul.

It burned, forever.

After a day of fire, the peaceful night.

Alone, carrying a silver staff and a large, knotted bundle, Mistress Ahn made her way up the path, onto the flat-topped rock. Behind her, on the canyon's opposite wall, glimmercrawls' golden threads glowed strongly.

She shivered.

Sombrely, she placed down her burden and walked to the pillar – quickly, now, for she wore no protection – as a curved blade glinted in her hand.

When she cut the cords, the boy almost fell. She caught him, dragging him quickly away from the pillar's influence.

Quickly...

Finally, by the deposited staff and bundle, she lowered the boy to the ground. Her head pounded with induced pain.

And he had endured an entire day of it.

There was a sac of glucofluid in the bundle; kneeling, she drew it forth, and used it to revive him. It was some time before it took effect, but suddenly – startling her – he got to his feet, and stood straight.

She got up to face him.

<<What is your name, young fellow?>>

He made no reply.

<<Your name?>> She tried again. <<What is it?>>

<<I am...>> – the boy who had been Harij looked at her calmly – <<no one.>>

Would it have been better had he died physically? It was what that old witch, Zil-Granria, had wanted.

Last try.

<<What do you do?>> she 'cast.

For a moment, nothing.

Then, <<I Seek.>>

She could only look away, not daring to reply.

And so she fully unwrapped the bundle, showed him the moisture-trap and quick-grow algae, the instruc-

tional crystal. She drew out a dark overtunic and cloak, and wrapped them around his shoulders as he stood unmoving. Then she retied the remaining supplies in the bundle.

When she handed him the silver staff, he accepted it...

<<I'm glad the dream remained, young friend.>>

... and watched, with patient eyes, as she made her way to the downward path, back to the township.

[[Have you ever wondered]] – the boy who once was Harij softly 'cast/thought – [[about our species' lack of tripartite symmetry?]]

But Mistress Ahn was gone, could no longer perceive his flux.

Then the boy – the newest Seeker – craned his head back, looking up at the full sphere of Magnus. Silver filigree on black: had its configuration altered slightly since he had last gazed upon it?

The Seeker exhaled softly, bent down to pick up his sparse supplies, and slung them beneath his cloak. Then, staff in hand, he set off across the mesa.

High above him, in the inky sky, a lone triblade soared.

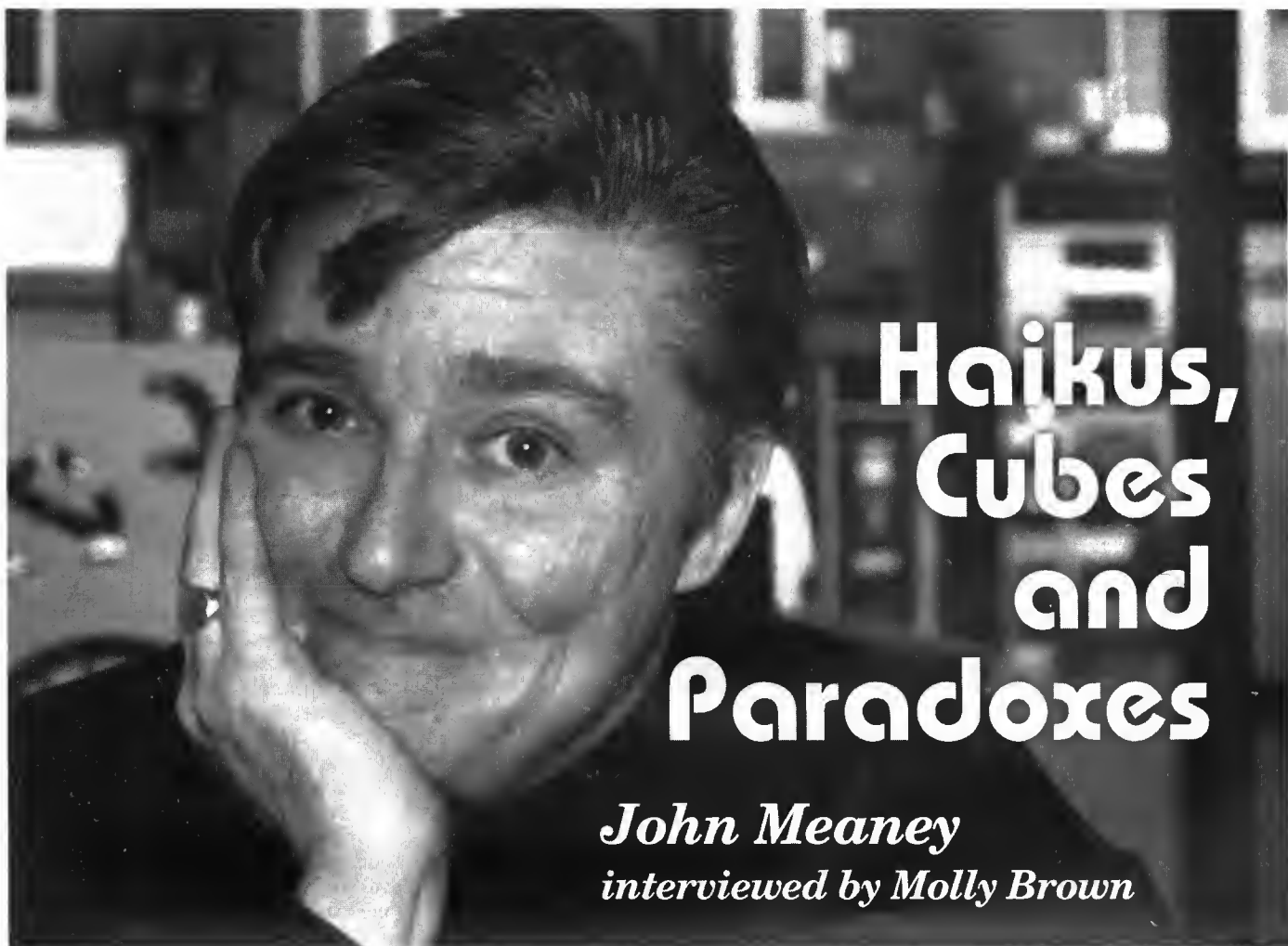
**John Meaney** is the subject of the interview that follows. His previous stories in *Interzone* include "Sharp Tang" (issue 82), "Parallax Transform" (issue 89) and "A Bitter Shade of Blindsight" (issue 110). He lives in Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

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# Haikus, Cubes and Paradoxes

*John Meaney*  
*interviewed by Molly Brown*

Photo: Molly Brown

*It's almost impossible to attend a science-fiction convention in the UK and not run into John Meaney and his wife, Yvonne.*

*Yvonne can usually be found in the dealers' room, selling clothing and crafts, while John (whose first novel, *To Hold Infinity*, was released to much acclaim from the likes of Stephen Baxter and Connie Willis) flits from panel to panel.*

*The convention environment is one in which the two of them seem very much at home, which may have something to do with the fact they met at a Star Trek convention.*

*A recent lunch with the Meaneyes (during which John modelled a tesseract out of some straws – more on that later) led to the following exchange of e-mails:*

*Molly Brown:* Your second novel, *Paradox*, is set in a feudal society divided into demesnes ruled over by Lords and Ladies who reside in splendid palaces while the lower echelons live in poverty; well-born young men are trained by fencing masters, travelling players perform in the market places... This could be medieval Europe, but it's the 36th century AD on a planet called Nulapeiron, where the stratification of society is literal: the population of Nulapeiron live underground, and status tends to be determined by which level, or stratum, you live on. Those from the lower strata are not allowed to travel upwards without a permit, and no one, not even the highest aristocracy, has ever seen the sky.

At first glance, *Paradox* would seem to bear no relation to your first novel, *To Hold Infinity*, but if you've read the first one, it soon becomes clear that *Paradox* is actually set in the same universe almost a thousand years later.

*John Meaney:* Almost as if I'd a plan, don't you think? I had to write some more about the Pilots: they're just so cool even if I say so myself.

Nulapeiron is an entire world, but

isolated. When first settled, the atmosphere was unbreathable; over twelve centuries, the aristocracy's subterranean demesnes have produced a very different culture. (Consider: twelve centuries ago, here, Charlemagne was founding an empire to challenge Byzantium). Nulapeiron's had time to evolve, and I hope the novel reflects this: different customs in different regions; different languages.

Here on Earth, we've seen a century of increasing democracy (in parts of the world) and the extinction of many isolated languages. But these are localized phenomena.

For that matter, when I travelled in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, the locals needed travel permits to leave their home-towns, and Komitet Gosudarstvenoi Bezopasnosti surveillance was everywhere. With luxury goods shops – *berioskas* – open only to elite party members and foreigners.

If humankind survives and disperses across other worlds, there'll be plenty of new modes of government. I suspect that aristocracy is one of the patterns a culture can easily fall into.

But, yes, you're right. The new novel's most distinguishing feature, according to the few who've read it before publication, is that it's a fantasy

novel which is simultaneously hard sf.

What can I say? The society, at least in the sector where Tom lives – and its neighbours – is an aristocracy, which always implies servitude of the greater populace, and I've shown life in the poorest strata and the richest. Servitors are treated harshly, but there has been a relaxation of strictures: a servitor can advance through study and hard work.

On the other hand, a slight lessening of the rules under an oppressive regime is – paradoxically! – one of the seeding conditions for violent, bloody revolution.

Although the Lords and Ladies form an intellectual elite, the real basis of their power is the use of Oracular truecasts, predictions of the future. The Oracles themselves are in many ways just tools of their noble masters.

**MB:** To me the most interesting thing about the society in *Paradox* is their idea of time running simultaneously forwards and backwards, so the future can be accurately foreseen for the simple reason that it has already happened. Nothing that has been foreseen can be prevented for the same reason: the future cannot be changed because it has already happened. So when someone is arrested on suspicion of committing a crime, the police don't just check whether or not the suspect has a criminal history, they check the suspect's criminal future. And when a devastating flood resulting in thousands of deaths is predicted, nothing is done to evacuate the potential victims because the flood is considered to have already happened, which means the victims are already dead... even though, as far as the present is concerned, they're still very much alive. Yet their belief in predestination is based on quantum theory.

**JM:** Oh, you noticed the "criminal future" bit? I'm glad that worked. Yes, it seems strange to indicate that accurate prediction could work, what with indeterminacy, chaos, complexity... But I've found the trick.

The late great Richard Feynman (Nobel Prize-winning physicist, and one of my heroes) pinpointed the double-slit experiment as being the core of quantum physics. Passing through one of two slits in an opaque barrier, an electron or photon behaves as though it knows of the other slit. Experimental fact. Predicted by theory.

Interpreting the results is something else.

The Copenhagen interpretation: the electron/photon is in a superimposed state, passing (impossibly) through both slits until detected beyond them: then it will have passed through only one. Like Schrodinger's cat, both alive

and dead until the box is opened. But that leads to Wigner's Paradox, not to mention Baxter's *Timelike Infinity*.

Another contender is the parallel universes interpretation. An electron/photon chooses one slit in one universe, while its shadow partner knows it must take the other. Two universes, totally unaware of each other, except for one particle in each... Pardon my disbelief. Unless it spawns a good story idea, of course, like your own "Women on the Brink of a Cataclysm" (*Interzone* 79).

Anyway, some folk are working on an interpretation using advanced and retarded waves, where any interaction consists of "communication" two ways in time. Between the actual future event which will occur and its cause in the past, the waves reinforce; otherwise, they cancel out.

Brilliant. One universe, one future. Laplace is vindicated.

Oh, but... That doesn't actually explain how anyone can see the predetermined future, only that there is one.

I think I should let people read the book for that part! But it's do to with cosmology and the nature of entropic time, and there are even some original speculations in there, all of my own.

**MB:** The hero of *Paradox* is Tom Corcorigan, and the plot could almost be summarized as Tom's rise and fall (perhaps to rise again?). He starts out as the son of a poor market trader in one of the lower strata, and what free time he has is divided between writing poetry and trying to avoid the local bully, who has it in for him. Then two things happen to change his life. First, he meets a woman in a cavern who turns out to be a Pilot, and she gives him a small device which tells him stories and sets him puzzles. Then an Oracle comes to the market and takes away his mother.

The gift from the Pilot gives him the love of riddles and paradoxes that leads to his being recognized as a great scientific theoretician... after losing an arm for a crime he didn't commit, spending several years as an indentured servant in a palace, and learning martial arts along the way.

**JM:** I know. It's *Hamlet*, *Great Expectations* and *Citizen of the Galaxy* all for the price of one...

One of the challenges I faced in writing of Tom's years of servitude was to avoid making him appear too passive. Despite the dark traumas driving him, he is powerless in his new circumstances as a Palace servitor. So his despair and desire for vengeance are turned inwards.

I had to balance his working within the system, bettering himself by education and disciplining himself with

running and martial arts, with his constant hatred of that system. It's the most positive way he can be. Just as prisoners in jails mutilate themselves when they can release their anger in no other way... he has to use that frustration, or be destroyed by it. For Tom, the self-discipline of intellectual and physical training is both his salvation and the honing of tools which allow him finally to wreak his vengeance.

**MB:** The practice of martial arts seems to be a major influence on your work; it crops up again and again in your writing.

**JM:** Purely autobiographical, just as John Irving's books often feature wrestlers... but I won't use the martial arts if they don't serve the story, as well.

Tom is a particularly obsessive character, and the relentless daily training and self discipline is exactly the kind of thing which would draw his attention.

Just as I've tried to show how strict aristocracy can be both good and bad (and how some of the nobles are sympathetic, while others are not: sometimes the same people are cruel and kind at different times) so I try to use the martial arts in non-obvious ways. Some non-practitioners think the arts are all about harmony and meditation: they've never had their ribs broken in sparring. Others think it's all about thuggery and violence: they've not experienced the moving zen of traditional forms.

The art which Tom learns (if you want to know the nerdy details) is a kind of hybrid of *hwarang do* and *savate*. The Pilots' fighting style, when they use it, combines the dazzling tactics of *pentjak silat* with the power of *shotokan karate*. Maybe a bit of *escrima*.

At least two of those are arts I expect most people haven't heard of, and they're not mentioned in the book. No expository lumps, no comic-book antics.

Want me to name some other writers heavily into martial arts?

How about this: Roger Zelazny, Walter Jon Williams, Steven Barnes. Not bad company, eh? Or Barbara Hambly, John Sandford (author of the Lucas Davenport crime novels) and Elleston Trevor (as Adam Hall, author of the Quiller books): all black belts in shotokan karate, as am I. Not to mention Tricia Sullivan and Nicola Griffith. (Griffith's latest [non-sf] book, *The Blue Place*, is superb.)

Oh, yeah... Joe Lansdale and Simon Hawke, they're both thugs. Don't tell 'em I said so.

Ask me another question, quick.

**MB:** On to Tom Corcorigan's fall: the disappearance of his mother leads to the all-consuming hatred that will



eventually cause him to throw everything away he has gained and achieved by becoming a murderer and a fugitive. But the murder is only made possible by Tom's tampering with his intended victim's concept of time and predestination – for which he uses the device given to him by the Pilot. So the Pilot's gift, which led to his rise, also inevitably leads to his fall. This seems to me to smack of fate, if not exactly predestination.

*JM:* There's probably a bit of the old hubris knocking around in there as well: Greek tragedy with the serial numbers filed off. Perhaps some yin-yang duality/balance.

But that's the way it goes. Tom's rise is driven by hate as much as ability. The Pilot's device, which becomes a kind of talisman within the story, is his secret resource over the long years of training... but eventually, as you say, it becomes a weapon.

On the other hand, his sudden descent is not in the immediate aftermath of his vengeance, but a while later. Partly this is my attempt to transcend simplistic storytelling: the novel ends neither with Tom's break from servitude, nor with the murder he later perpetrates. But, psychologically, he's no longer part of civilized society, whether noble or plebeian. It's the price he always had to pay.

*MB:* Let's leap back nearly a thousand years in history, to the world of your first novel, *To Hold Infinity*. Here, interstellar travel through mu-space is commonplace and easily accessible to ordinary people going on business trips or holidays, and the Pilots are not only accepted, but revered.

*JM:* Revered, yes. But there's a hint of fear as well, I hope.

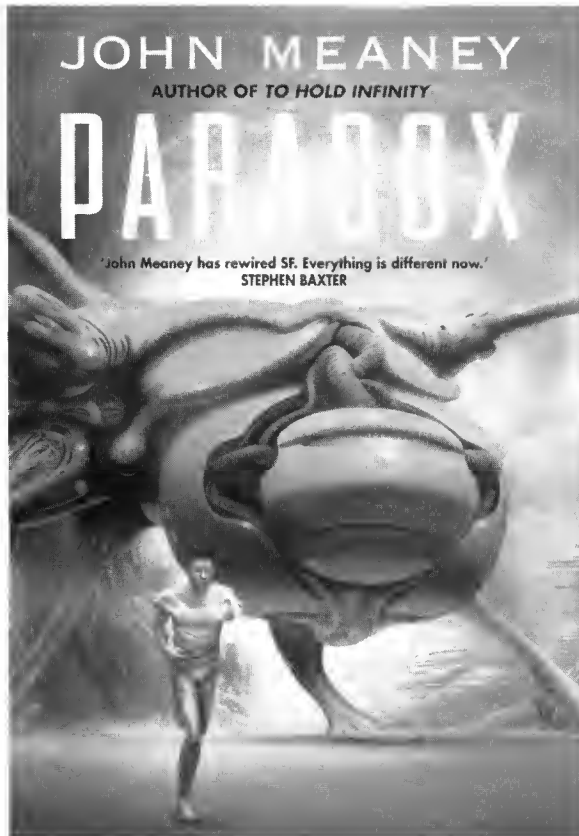
The high points of Fulgor's history are defined in a couple of paragraphs, when Yoshiko is researching the background of the LuxPrime corporation. I've been totally consistent with this: although it's not made explicit, Nulapeiron and Fulgor were colonized at around the same period in time.

The big difference, of course, is the initial and continued isolation of Nulapeiron. That's mainly due to the conditions under which the colony began. The details are not mentioned in *Paradox*: to Tom's contemporaries, Nulapeiron's founding, other worlds, and Pilots, are all the stuff of legend. But I worked it all out, regardless.

I used a simple model of global population growth set up in a spreadsheet, and played with the parameters until I was satisfied with the timeline.

At the time of Tom's story, Nulapeiron's population is ten billion, but decreasing. It's a long way into the book before you find this out: for all of Tom's early life, he's lived in surroundings where no one travels more than a few kilometres through the tunnels, communications are non-existent for poor folk, and there's no more than the occasional visitor from the (almost equally poor) stratum above.

By the 36th century, though, Fulgor is no longer a paradise. There's a hint of that in *Paradox*: one sentence close to the beginning. If you blink, you've missed it. Otherwise, there's no hint of what's going on among the other inhab-



ited worlds. I'm hoping the sweep and scope of Nulapeiron is enough: it's a world with more inhabitants than 21st-century Earth, and just as rich a mixture of cultures and histories.

*MB:* But one major parallel between Fulgor and Nulapeiron is the division of society. While on Nulapeiron, the divide is between the aristocracy and the common people, on Fulgor, the divide is between the Luculenti, who wear an implanted crown of wires that functions as a kind of modem linked directly to the brain, and the unenhanced, regular people limited to communication by old-fashioned methods like speech and writing. And like Nulapeiron, Fulgor is on the verge of revolution.

*JM:* Partly, this is due to my wanting to explore some of the same themes

further. In terms of the revolution, it's hardly touched upon in *To Hold Infinity*, and it doesn't affect that much of society: only the outcasts called Shadow People.

In *Paradox* I have the chance to explore the violence and upheaval, the mixed objectives, the personal tragedies and ambitions, the confusion. Think of Robespierre, Trotsky... The outcome of revolution is never what the movement hopes. And there's always (witness Ireland, Bosnia) entrenched bitterness and fear. Always justified, on all sides: usually there are more than two sides.

Another way of looking at it: when's the best time in a culture's history to set a novel? An old order being torn apart, a new one born... Obvious, innit?

In some ways, Fulgor's divisions are simpler. The Luculenti are an elite with a purely technological advantage: plexcores extend their brains, and they're immersed in the virtual Skein.

I had a lot of fun with that. The verbal special effects, to indicate multi-modal communication, on not just visual but tactile and even proprioceptive channels. My antecedents for that (I realized months afterwards) were the telepathic conversations in Simak's *Time Is The Simplest Thing* and Bester's *The Demolished Man*... Books I read when I was ten years old.

*MB:* To go back to *Paradox* for a moment, some of the things Tom and his academic colleagues do, such as drawing visible multi-dimensional diagrams in the air with nothing more than a finger, strike me as the kind of ability a Luculentus would envy. In *To Hold Infinity*, someone mentions in passing that the technology is being

developed to create Luculenti without the wires; is that what's happened by the time of *Paradox*? Is everyone a Luculentus now, or am I imagining connections that aren't there?

*JM:* Actually, the wires are already obsolete in *To Hold Infinity*; they've become a status symbol. They are functional, but unnecessary: should a Luculentus' headgear be torn from their scalp for some reason, other embedded components can perform the same task.

There is a legal and practical limit to the number of plexcores a Luculentus can have. The practical constraints – due to lightspeed communication delays – are circumvented by the psychopathic Rafael's use of illegal mu-space tech. But the bigger a plexcore nexus, the greater the scope for expanding neural struc-

tures. Just as human consciousness seems to be an emergent property of competing/communicating neural groups, so an illegally extended plex-core nexus can give rise to posthuman thought structures. Rafael's insane enough to ignore the dangers.

A thousand years later, on Nulapeiron, there is no such virtual environment as the Skein. But there is a connection: many of the Lords' and Ladies' abilities stem from their drug-like logotropic treatments. Subtly programmed femtotechnology, rather than the *tabulae rasae* of plexcores.

MB: In Yoshiko Sunadomari, we once again have a protagonist who is gifted at science, a lover of word-games and puzzles, and whose daily routine revolves around the practice of martial arts. Tom Corcorigan writes poetry; Yoshiko writes haikus.

JM: I guess I'm a frustrated poet, too.

There are historic undertones to Tom's poetry. Language and verse often define nationalism; W. B. Yeats was a revolutionary icon. At least I didn't write about religion...

But I also just wanted the excuse to write a few verses. Did you know that Zelazny was a pretty mean poet, as well as a fiction writer?

In contrast to Tom, Yoshiko is a very sane individual. Her daily training honours tradition and gives her strength. Her main art is *naginata-do*, the use of the halberd: the art of the samurai women. Before arriving on Fulgor, she has never used her skill in a real-life confrontation, and has never expected to.

Travel-lagged, in a strange culture, and totally stressed out, her training keeps body and mind intact. That was written from the heart!

Rather than the passion of Tom's poetry, Yoshiko's haikus are the cool, disciplined product of an ordered mind.

MB: Every chapter of *To Hold Infinity* opens with a haiku. I had assumed the haikus were there for artistic effect, setting a mood for each chapter, until the day we met for lunch in a South London café and you proceeded to demonstrate, by spreading a lot of straws across the table, that the haikus were actually two-dimensional illustrations of four-dimensional cubes. All I really remember about your explanation was that it drew a lot of sideways glances from other customers sitting nearby, so would you mind going through it again? Slowly this time...

JM: OK... If you stick all 36 haikus together in the right way, you get a hypercube, otherwise known as a tesseract. A three-dimensional projec-

tion of a four-dimensional cube.

At the time of *To Hold Infinity*, all visual displays have long been holographic, and it has affected written language, since sheets of text can hang in the air, interwoven, colour-coded, changing with time. It's like the money on Fulgor... Writing hasn't disappeared because of technology, it's become more complex. Imagine this cheery haiku hanging vertically in mid-air in front of you:

Graves. The mid-winter winds  
Shake lonely branches.  
Longest night, shortest day.

Then imagine this one, also hanging vertically, but bent back at 90 degrees to the first. The beginning of each line corresponds to the end of a line on the first haiku.

Winds wash cold, freezing birds.  
Branches, rows of small shadows.  
Day lies dreaming.

There you have two faces of a cube. Add another two haikus, with the necessary words in the right places, and four haikus loop around, forming a hollow (if not holo) square. Then a top and bottom surface (middle words of a sentence can be a node).

Then you just extend the concept to form a tesseract. One way of modeling a hypercube – although not the best way to visualize it – is to put a small cube inside a big one, and join the corners. That's the easiest way of putting the haikus together.

To visualize, there's a better way. To get in the right frame of mind, draw two overlapping squares, one shifted diagonally with regard to the other; draw lines to join the corresponding corners. That's a 2-D drawing of a cube. Now, in three dimensions, model two interlocking cubes: again one shifted diagonally from the other. And, again, join the corresponding corners.

Then stare at one corner really, really hard, until you convince yourself that all four lines are (impossibly) at right angles to each other, and you get a mystic satori sensation of everything wrapping around to form a weird, mystical shape...

What could be simpler?

A thousand years later, in *Paradox*, writing is in the form of tricons, a form of interactive, motile holographic calligraphy: like Chinese, but even more powerful and subtle. For sure, linear writing will go the way of cuneiform and hieroglyphics. Isn't that great?

MB: Another thing you mentioned that day was that there were jokes for programmers hidden within the computer-speak of the Luculenti. Since I'm not a programmer, can you give me an example of one of those jokes?

JM: Well, for instance, there's a variable declaration of type trinary, implying that its possible values are true, false or maybe...

MB: I bet that had them rolling in the aisles.

JM: Perhaps I'm stretching the concept of "joke" a little too far.

A certain well-known American writer – OK, it was Howard Hendrix – actually went through all the coded message IDs (if you like, the tech-notelepathic operating system's error messages) and checked that I had used them consistently throughout the book. That's a very obsessive techie kind of thing to do.

Naturally I'd already done it myself...

I had a good reason for inserting fragments of program code. I think that cyberpunk revitalized sf just when the genre needed it, I'm a great admirer of Bill Gibson, Bruce Sterling and Neal Stephenson, but, despite software's prominence as a motif, you never actually see any code. So I thought I'd open myself up to professional ridicule, and go for it. Thankfully, I've only had compliments from fellow IT-types and computer scientists... so far.

For genuinely funny maths jokes, read Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon*.

MB: Before *Paradox* and *To Hold Infinity* came six short stories in *Interzone*. Of the six, three are set in the universe of mu-space and the Pilots. Let's start with one that isn't.

"Sanctification" (IZ 69) isn't about mu-space and Pilots, but it does focus on another recurring theme in your work: the passing on of knowledge, either preceded by, or resulting in, death. (In *To Hold Infinity*, the Luculenti pass on their memories and personalities in a special ceremony that results in the death of the donor, "Sharp Tang" is about the passing of information through cannibalism – resulting in the death of the hero, in "Timeslice" a woman kills herself in order to pass her knowledge of self-defence to her son who is being held captive in another timeline, etc.)

JM: I have a recurring dream of my own death, too. Perhaps that's not the kind of thing I ought to reveal!

"Sanctification" was my second published story, and it was written during a bad and stressful time for me. I channelled my emotions into the story itself: for me, it was a turning point, in that I knew I would be able to do that again, whenever I needed it.

As for the self-sacrifice: well, that's part of heroism, I think, and we all need heroes. For most people,

strength is not shown by sudden acts of physical courage, but by small things over the long haul: enduring a stressful career for the family's sake, or looking after aged parents.

The passing on of information... I hadn't thought of this as a theme in my work, but all we really have to leave our descendants is our culture. What else is there?

Turning that around, we are the recipients of an incrementally grown intellectual environment which has passed through our ancestors. In one sense, it's all maya – illusion – but in another sense it's the fundamental reality: our shared universe. Mortgages and taxes are no more real than the chemical signals which govern an ant's life within its colony. But we ignore them at our peril. On the positive side, we're human because of the intangible sea which surrounds us: language, social structures. Which co-evolved with the physical, of course: from telecomms to plumbing.

From one viewpoint, each of us defines an entire universe. But in another way, we're just tiny ephemerae. Ten percent of our body weight is bacteria: we're emergent properties of this vast microbial ocean which has existed for four billion years on Earth. All of it made from stardust.

Is that exciting, or what?

**MB:** "A Bitter Shade of Blindsight" (IZ 110) is the chilling tale of a female astronaut who returns to Earth after witnessing an atrocity on a colony planet to confront the parallel self who returned home to a comfortable life with a husband and children. What I love about this story is not only the twist to quantum theory that makes the two selves able to co-exist in the same world, but how everyone takes it for granted that there are now two of them. (Actually three, as it turns out.)

**JM:** Well, yes. When you have a crazy idea, you have to push it all the way. You have to think about how heroine number two was able to travel back... But it's not obvious, and I deliberately don't dwell on it until the story's end.

Actually, I think that story may be a spectacular failure, though some people love it (or have been kind enough to lie convincingly).

First, the bit that works... The "teleportation" of entire starships, which involves a duplicate appearing at the far end, while another copy stays at home. It's a moot point to discuss whether either of those is the original copy.

But, yes, I dived into that old quantum physics again to get a grip on the real weirdness. There really has been

research into quantum duplication, by a physicist named... Scully.

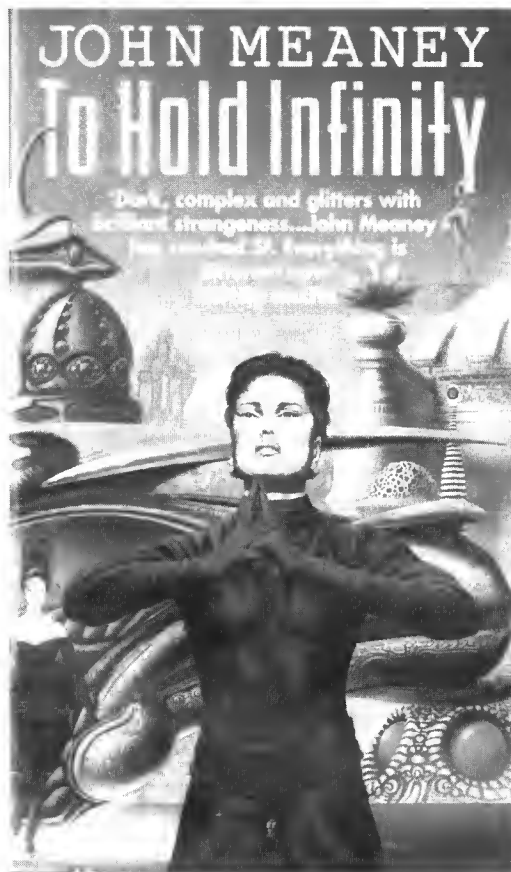
Gawd help me, it's true.

So the technology's a Scully-drive, or Scully Portals, but I had to bury that deeply in the story, to avoid offending all those Spooky Mulder groupies. Or is that Mulder's spooky groupies?

As for the failure...

Well, there's mention of hidden dimensions (as required by superstring theory), and my notion that all sorts of lifeforms may exist there which we'll never sense. It's like dark matter: the idea that we can only see 90 percent, maybe only ten percent, of all matter – which may just be neutrinos, if they have mass. If so, they comprise a ghost-like plane of existence we can hardly touch.

On the literary side, Hemingway wrote a story from which the whole ending is missing – a story gains



depth from deliberately omitted details – and Zelazny wrote a story of omission, too. I once explained to the artist known as SMS what the real story of "A Bitter Shade of Blindsight" is, in terms of the unseen lifeform which no character in the story, no human, can perceive... and he kindly informed me that I'm totally insane.

The clue's in the title. Blindsight is a very strange neurological phenomenon. Sometimes, with accident victims whose visual cortex has been separated from the rest of the brain, they are tragically blind. But they can cor-

rectly "guess" where an object is, far too often for guesswork. They know more than they are conscious of.

So there's a shadow counterpart to the main story: but absolutely none of it is written down.

...I'm glad the story's human side works, though. And Navajo culture's interesting. I've more to explore, there.

**MB:** Now back to the origins of Meaney-world, where Pilots have huge black eyes and live in a fractal dimension. Though "Sharp Tang" (IZ 82; mentioned in passing above) is set in that universe, it's not immediately apparent, as mu-space and the Pilots are not the main focus of the story. While on the other hand, "Parallax Transform" (IZ 89) is the definitive Pilot story; the main characters are referred to in *To Hold Infinity*, and the story itself, with one or two slight changes, reappears in *Paradox* as "Karyn's Tale." Am I right in thinking "Parallax Transform" is where your concept of the Pilots really began?

**JM:** I originally wrote "Sharp Tang" using different characters: quite a different story, and one which didn't work. So I set it aside.

Then I started "Parallax Transform," which, you're right, begins the Pilots' story. But I got hung up on the physics of mu-space, so my wife, Yvonne – always the first reader of my stories, and my most valuable critic – suggested I go back and rewrite "that alien cannibals story." So I did. Which is how a Pilot appears off-stage in "Sharp Tang," and mu-space is mentioned, but there are no details.

It was the concept of mu-space which started it.

From the science-fictional point of view, hyperspace is a standard literary device and Pernese dragons go between, but no one ever mentions what hyperspace really is. So I thought, blithely, that I would have a go. How about a continuum whose dimensions are physically fractal?

Very funky, very trendy... but thinking about it made my head hurt. Hence the rest period, while I put the story aside.

And mu-space, the term itself, is a kind of pun. I expect most people with a science background to assume that "mu" is the Greek character: the standard abbreviation for "micro"... and I'm happy with that. But I was also thinking of the Japanese character, which mean limitless, infinite. Pirsig used it in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* to describe the state of a Boolean variable when a computer is switched off: neither true nor false.

But it's the Pilots themselves who

are interesting, yes.

In one sense there's more about the Pilots in *Paradox* than in the first book since, as you say, "Karyn's Tale" (a slightly modified "Parallax Transform") appears as a sequence of "flash-back" insertions within the main story. But they remain mysterious, I hope... though I know more than I'm telling.

I'm fascinated by the Pilots, just as much as anyone else is.

**MB:** Your first published story, "Spring Rain" (IZ 61), was the short and sparely written, yet deeply affecting, tale of an ageing master of martial arts facing up to what he sees as his final challenge. When you wrote that, did you have the slightest idea that this would be the first instalment in a sprawling saga spread over thousands of years, not to mention many *hundreds* of thousands of words?

**JM:** I didn't have the faintest notion of a continuing saga. In fact, I hadn't really thought of it in those terms until just now!

"Spring Rain" was the first story which I wrote with serious intent. I had written fragments and first drafts since I was 14 years old; I submitted scarcely anything. At the back of my mind was the notion that one needed to be a certain age, to have had experience of life and relationships, in order to create believable characters.

Then one day I realized my 34th birthday was approaching...

But part of preparing to be a writer, if that's the way to think of it, was that I had stored up in my mind the written advice and anecdotes of Zelazny, Ellison and others. So I remembered what Zelazny did just before he wrote his first published

story: he looked back over his previous efforts, analyzing them to find their one major flaw.

In his case, he felt he was over-explaining. In my case, I had insufficient control of the narrative flow. So I made sure I had the ending imagined in detail. The image: a parcel left lying outside someone's front door; a chrysanthemum with one petal torn; a haiku attached.

Another haiku!

First, I wrote the haiku...

Red and green neon casts  
The shadow of bamboo-leaves  
Sweeping the ground.

...and, having done that, I wrote the story. And Mr Pringle liked it!

I posted the signed contract from Heathrow airport, en route to an sf convention at Trinity College, Dublin, called Trincon 400. Not many cons begin with a formal dinner at which a gowned scholar recites grace in Latin, and every diner has a free half-pint of Guinness (a legacy of Sir Arthur Guinness to the college).

Anne McCaffrey – whom I've known since my first convention: Novacon in 1978, I think – congratulated me on my first sale. And introduced me to her friends, including Katherine Kurtz and Scott Macmillan, who beamed at my news: remembering how that first sale feels.

In most arenas, a newcomer's arrival signals competition; here, there was a sense of kinship. That's overly romantic, and the others involved won't even remember the moment... but reality is what you make of it.

Anne McCaffrey had once advised me to write a story involving martial arts, so her advice, too, was part of "Spring Rain"'s genesis. A story with no heroics: Akazawa Sensei is in his

60s, becoming physically frail. I try to deal honestly with the subject of fear, and the motivations which keep people in the arts for their whole lives.

I'm getting pretentious again... It's just a story. I'm glad people liked it.

When I was writing *To Hold Infinity*, I decided to make Yoshiko and Tetsuo the descendants of characters from "Spring Rain." This means I have a deeper knowledge of the family's history than is explicit in the novel.

It's as though "Parallax Transform"'s influence extended both forwards and backwards in time and rewrote my personal history...

At any rate, there are links between the two novels and the various stories set in the mu-space/Pilots future. As James Clavell did with his books set centuries apart in the Orient, I've made some characters distant descendants of others, and inserted other oblique references. Infrequently, though: I'm trying to create entire imagined worlds.

What fun!

**MB:** And finally, what next?

**JM:** A new Nulapeiron book: *Context*. The next 15 years of Tom Corcorigan's life are no less traumatic than those described in *Paradox*. It's a dramatic time in Nulapeiron's history, and I'll be giving hints of what's occurred on the other inhabited worlds, during the millennium which has passed since *To Hold Infinity*. Beneath the epic fantasy will be buried more weird physics, philosophy and cosmology.

And, yes: more Pilots.

Definitely.

(*To Hold Infinity* is published by Bantam Books; *Paradox* is published by Bantam Press.)

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All it takes is a little imagination!



# The Welfare Man Retires

*Chris Beckett*

I think I've spoken to you before about Cyril Burkitt, the registration manager? It was his job to preside over the registration meetings where decisions were made about Special Category citizenship. Do you remember I told you about how some ungrateful Special Category citizens attacked him in his car? (Or "Dreggies," as some unkindly call them.)

Cyril went to pieces a bit after that attack, made several weird rulings which had to be overturned and embarrassed people in registration meetings with off-the-wall remarks about woolly mammoths and the Berlin Wall apropos of nothing in particular. It was as if a veneer had been torn away by that distressing incident, to reveal... what? Madness? Anarchy? Despair? Eventually the District Director offered him an early retirement package, on health grounds.

(The DeSCA is usually very tight about early retirement. But in Cyril's case it seemed they were willing to pay out whatever was necessary just to see the back of him.)

There was a small ceremony to mark his departure at the conference room at the Knowle South estate office where he was based. Cyril's boss, the Estate Director, Peter Hershaw, was there, as was *his* boss, Susan Groob, the District Director. Hershaw, a rather smooth, smartly dressed man 15 years Cyril's junior, made an amusing farewell speech with the usual titbits taken from Cyril's personnel file charting his 30-year service latterly with the DeSCA and before that, with the old Social Services Departments.

Cyril's was not what you would call a brilliant career. He worked for some ten years as a social worker and then as a manager of various social work teams (the

Childcare North Team, the Initial Investigations Team, the Family Assessment Team...) There was no obvious line of development. It was more that he drifted to and fro like a cork in the sea, bobbing up here and there as each wave of organizational restructuring threw up new teams and new job titles and abolished old ones.

And of course, the last decade of his career had seen a really radical rethink of the welfare services, the emergence of the legal concept of Special Category citizenship and the amalgamation of the various services that dealt primarily with welfare claimants – including social services, health and public housing – into the Department for Special Category Administration: the DeSCA.

Do you remember those days? Do you remember how this new giant super-department was described by the Prime Minister as "A dynamic new task force drawing together services that up to now have been dispersed across many different departments and levels of government, to tackle, once and for all, the insidious problem of social exclusion"?

Of course the actual *staff* were not dynamic or new. They were the old staff with new job titles (just as the people now designated as "Special Category" were the same five percent of the population that had been the main recipients of welfare services for several generations). Among the old hands remoulded into components of the new dispensation was Cyril Burkitt who became, to give him his full title, Team Manager, Human Services (Family Welfare Team), Southern Bristol Estates.

The DeSCA itself then went through further reorganizations. Human Services' functions were subcontracted out to various companies and not-for-profit organizations, who of course promptly re-recruited most

of the old Human Services staff. Cyril's old team was taken over by a company called Wessex Family Action, but they decided not to take on Cyril himself. He was regarded, I think, as unreliable, and too openly sceptical about the new welfare ideology. (Not that he ever offered a coherent alternative, as far as I'm aware).

Anyway, his long government and local government service would have entitled him to a fairly hefty redundancy package which the DeSCA didn't want to pay out, so instead they gave him the Registration Manager job. It's a job which sounds important but is really a matter of chairing, over and over again, a particular kind of meeting whose composition and structure is very precisely laid down by statute and regulation. In other words he was put into a job where it was thought he could not do much harm.

I suppose he knew that, and I would guess he hated it, but he had to accept or find another job outside the DeSCA and its network of subcontractors. There were very few agencies outside that circle that were taking on social work staff and for each job that came up there must have been many applicants a lot more dynamic and interesting – and young – than tired, old Cyril Burkitt.

Somewhere in there his wife died. People said it was her that held him together.

And then, as I say, there was that violent attack on the Knowle South Estate. Three men waylaid him in his car. There was little doubt that they intended to kill him. It seems odd that mild, doubting Cyril Burkitt should be the focus of such intense hatred. But, as the man who presided at meetings that decided whether people were to be assigned Special Category status, Cyril had become a much more public symbol of the system than, say, the Estate Directors or the District Director above them, who really ran the thing.

But then even the District Director has very little real power. We are all cogs in a machine.

Anyway, Peter Hershaw made his amusing speech with its little jokes about what Cyril had put down on his application forms over the years and so on, and Cyril was duly presented with his farewell card and his book token and his stainless steel garden spade.

Then it was Cyril's turn. After the usual thank-yous, he started to talk about the families he had worked with, first as a social worker, then as a social work manager and then as a registration manager.

And Cyril mentioned the names that had kept recurring over his whole career – the Wheelers, the Pendants, the Delaneys, the Blows, the Tonsils... With each name everyone laughed and gave a cheer of recognition. Everyone had worked with members of these families. Everyone had tales that they could tell.

"...And it occurs to me," Cyril said, "that these are the Great Families of the Bristol Special Category estates, the famous old bloodlines, just as surely as in times gone by each county had its famous aristocratic families. These are the Great Families – and if I am going to say goodbye to my job properly, I should say goodbye to

them as well as to all of you. So what I have decided to do is to hire a hall," (he named a very large hall quite near the centre of town), "and throw my own retirement party there to which I am going invite the Pendants and the Wheelers and the Tonsils and all of them, as well of course as many of you as care, or dare, to come!"

Everyone laughed, loudly and generously, thinking that this was some kind of joke. (Cyril was known for his off-beam sense of humour). And Cyril just stood there and smiled and waited until gradually it dawned on us that he really meant it.

"I've sent the invitations out this morning," he said, "the party will be on June 21st from 8 p.m. You are all invited. I'll provide food and drink. And I promise you an interesting evening and one or two surprises."

We all looked round at Peter Hershaw and Susan Groob. You should have seen those frozen smiles!

At the first possible moment Peter and Susan were off in a huddle in Peter's office, along with Peter's opposite number from New Hartcliffe, a couple of other managers from Knowle South and a legal adviser on the video link from the district office.

A friend of mine was one of the people present, so I heard later what went on. Peter and Susan were not happy *at all* about Cyril's retirement party. How would it look in the press and on TV? A former DeSCA officer brings hundreds of dreggies into the centre of Bristol and lets them drink at his expense. What if there was a disturbance of some kind? What if a nuisance was caused? It wouldn't reflect at all well on the Department.

But what to do? Someone suggested that Cyril had broken the confidentiality rules by writing to people whose names and addresses he had obtained from DeSCA files. Perhaps he could be prevailed upon to withdraw the invitations or face the possibility of a disciplinary action that might affect his retirement package?

But the lawyer said it wouldn't wash. The only information Cyril had used was names and addresses of DeSCA service users and the only people he could be said to have disclosed these to were the service users themselves. Hardly a breach of confidentiality unless they were unaware of their own names and addresses!

Then they wondered if Cyril had perhaps broken the rules about DeSCA staff seeing service users socially. But again, it wasn't going to work. When they looked up the relevant section of the Manual they found it stated very clearly that the reason there were rules at all was to avoid a conflict of interest in future professional dealings between the staff member and the service users concerned. This obviously didn't arise in Cyril's case, as he was going to retire.

So Peter Hershaw declared that they were not going to be able to head this off and that therefore they would need to find a way of "managing" or "containing" it.

Cyril was in his office clearing out his desk when Peter Hershaw phoned with his proposal. And, as it happens, I had just dropped in to wish him all the best.

"We love your retirement party idea Cyril," Hershaw

enthused. "And how typical of you to find a way of breaking down the them-and-us barriers!"

"Well, thank you," said Cyril, genuinely disarmed.

"What we'd like to suggest, though, is that you relocate the party to the Community Centre at Knowle South. It would be easier for many estate residents to get to and as it's a DeSCA facility, we can waive the fees as a small gesture of support for your wonderful idea. In fact Susan and I are fairly confident we could cover the catering costs for you as well and save you a bit more of your hard-earned cash."

"It's very nice of you," said Cyril, "but I've got all my plans worked out now, and I really can't change the venue. Thanks for the offer though."

He put down the phone.

"What was that about?" he asked me.

(I never knew whether his naïveté was genuine or a kind of act.)

The phone rang again a few minutes later and this time it was Susan Groob.

"To be honest, Cyril, we're a *bit* worried about you having your party in the centre of town. If there was any kind of disturbance it would reflect so badly, not so much on the Department – we've got broad shoulders after all – but on the people you really care about, the SC people themselves. Do you see what I mean? Am I making sense? It might feed into the 'dreggie' stereotype."

Cyril politely promised to think about it.

"They really don't want this party to happen, do they?" he observed with a little chuckle, as he put down the phone. "And that's *before* they know what I've got planned."

My informant in the management team tells me that Peter Hershaw tried various other manoeuvres in an attempt to head off Cyril's plans (he tried to lean on the owners of the hall, for example) but in the end he and Groob had to admit defeat. Special Category citizens do face certain legal restrictions. They can't borrow money without permission, for example, and if they are charged and found guilty of certain offences, they may be restricted for a time from leaving their own estates. But there wasn't yet a law against their going across town to attend a party.

So there we were on Midsummer night, watching the Pendants and the Wheelers and the Tonsils and all the rest arriving and not knowing quite what to expect. No one knew what to expect, but clearly there were those who feared the worst, because there was an obvious police presence in the street outside – comprising both DeSCA Constabulary officers and officers from the Avon and Somerset Police. And a police helicopter was wheeling around, not quite overhead, but over the neighbouring streets, as if trying to give the impression that it just happened to be passing by.

Cyril must have spent a fortune. The place used to be a warehouse of some kind and is *huge*: a cavernous space like an aircraft hangar with enormous doors at the end.

There were long tables all along one side piled with food and hundreds of glasses of champagne all poured

and waiting in rows with a team of catering staff at hand to replenish glasses. There was a DJ playing records on the stage. There were dozens of tables for people to sit at, with white tablecloths and a vase of flowers on each.

Everyone set to. It was all very strange. The vast majority of the several hundred guests were residents of the estates. Many DeSCA staff had stayed away. Those like me, who had turned up, found ourselves not only in a minority, but in a completely different relationship to the Delaneys and the Pendants and the others to anything we had ever experienced before. However liberal our ideas, however much we had tried to treat everyone with respect, the fact remained that when we had met these folk before, they had been asking for help with their financial problems, or seeking rehousing, or complaining about their neighbours. Or if not that, then we had been investigating them for benefit frauds, or for fiddling their power meters, or for mistreating their children. We had never met any of them before except with a problem attached to them as a kind of label.

And here they were, many of them in suits and ties or party dresses, as our equals, as fellow party guests, fellow human beings, outnumbering us 20 to one. I said hello to some I knew. I chatted to some I didn't. We talked about the merits of the beach at Weston, and of the Prime Minister and about the way you couldn't stop your kids from playing with video games the whole time. They were just people. Some were interesting and attractive, some tedious or dull, like people at any party. It sounds awful, and I feel embarrassed to admit it, but this came with the force of a revelation to me!

I had really started to relax and enjoy myself when Cyril Burkitt got up on the stage at the top of the hall, tapped on the microphone and asked everyone if he could have their attention. It was a large audience. The room was big, all the tables were full and there were still a lot of people left standing at the sides and the back.

The DeSCA staff who were there said it was brave of Cyril to stand up alone like that in front of all those people. He wasn't regarded with affection on the estates. After all three estate residents had not long previously tried to kill him. (And from what I've heard of the attack, many people came out to watch, but no one lifted a finger to try and help.) Why *would* these people like him? When he met them he was usually consigning them to Special Category status, after presiding over a meeting that picked over the sad, humiliating failures of their lives. SC status might be necessary if you wanted to claim benefits, but it was hardly a dignified state.

So yes, perhaps he was brave, though I think that Cyril's courage arose at least in part from a kind of emptiness that had been growing inside him since his wife died and since he was sidelined into the registration manager job. I actually think he didn't care much if he lived or died. But whatever the reason, he did something that not many of us would have dared to do. He stood up in front of a large crowd of people who had reason to dislike him, and asked them all to be quiet while he made a speech.

It was at about this point that the TV people arrived.

Cyril spoke of his career as a social worker and a social work manager dealing with families and children and child protection work. And he spoke of how, quite early in his career, it had struck him what a high proportion of the people he worked with were poor and on state benefits, were unemployed, or came from families where unemployment was the norm.

"Not that I think only poor people have problems with their children," he said, "or only poor people are capable of child abuse. Far from it. I think better-off families have plenty of these problems too. But I think if you are better-off there are lots of ways of concealing your problems and avoiding outside interference. We did occasionally work with cases in the old days where the parents were well-to-do or professional people. But as to the poor and the unemployed, we had meetings with their schools, we had discussions with their doctors, we liaised with the police. Sometimes I felt we had their family lives under constant routine surveillance."

There was a small rustle of whispered reactions across the hall.

"All my adult life," Cyril went on, "there have been a million or more unemployed people in the country. Sometimes the figures go down a bit and the government claims the credit. Sometimes the figures go up and the government blames its predecessors or the international economic situation. But basically, there have always been a substantial number of people without a job. (The only time in my life when this was not the case was during my childhood in the 1960s, before I can remember. And then, curiously, the government was so worried about the shortage of labour that it invited immigrants to come in and do the low-paid jobs.) Unemployment has become a permanent fact of life. Some families have been unemployed for generations. Something is always about to be done about it. But nothing ever really changes.

"And now of course, we have the DeSCA, the latest scheme to tackle the problem of poverty and unemployment for once and for all. All *you* lot would be gathered together, that was the plan, and given a special status. *Us* lot would work with you and help you organize your lives: social services and health and police and everyone all working together as a team. We would sort out your problems and get you back into the economy again. That was the idea. But the unemployment figures kept on stubbornly refusing to go down.

"And suddenly one day it came to me! We're supposed to keep on battling but *we are not supposed to win*. Those figures aren't *meant* to really come down.

The government needs you lot to be out of work. That's how they keep some sort of discipline in the labour force! You are a warning to the working population. They don't want to lose their jobs and end up living on benefits in dreg estates like you, so they don't shirk and they don't demand high wages. (As they did in the 1960s when labour was scarce). The government *needs* you people out of work!

"But here's the complicated bit. The government might

need you out of work but it can't admit to it. They can't admit to leaving a million or two people on the scrapheap on purpose. They can't admit it to the public and maybe they can't admit it even to themselves. So the government has *to be seen to be doing something* about it. Hence the DeSCA, hence the various welfare and community services, hence the job training schemes."

Cyril laughed as he looked out at the uncomfortable faces.

"Probably most of you have worked all this out long ago. I've always been a bit slow on the uptake. Actually, there's no secret about the fact that unemployment is part of the scheme of things. If you look in economics textbooks, for example, you can see it written there in black and white: the economy *needs* a certain level of unemployment in order to prevent inflation. I just hadn't quite grasped what this meant.

"But once I *had* realized this was the case, I began to see that most of what the DeSCA does is shadow-boxing. Job training schemes, for example, may help a few individuals, but only at the expense of other individuals who must lose their place in the economy to make room for the newcomers. Social work services may help a few people with their lives, but only at the expense of making a whole community less confident and sure of itself, and more dependent on outside help.

"I tell you, when we get a government which says it's going to give everyone the legal *right* to a job, then perhaps we'll have a government that really means business about unemployment. But until that day, forget it. You can have all the DeSCA staff you like with all the resources and all the best intentions in the world, and *nothing is going to change*."

Here he paused. There was absolute silence. He smiled.

"And so," Cyril said, "what I've decided to do today is to give credit where it's due for once. You people are hard up and face all kinds of restrictions and intrusions in your lives. You take all kinds of abuse. *But really you are doing it for the sake of the rest of us*. You are helping to keep inflation down. Give yourself a clap. You deserve it."

A puzzled, half-hearted applause arose and then petered out in the hall.

"What I've decided to do, in recognition of your services in the battle against inflation, is to get a medal struck for you. Here it is, look..."

He reached into his jacket pocket and held up a large, gold, star-shaped medal on a striped ribbon.

"I'm calling it, the Hero First Class of the Anti-Inflationary War. I would like to award it to all of you, but I'm afraid that isn't possible. So what I'm going to do is ask just a few of you to accept the medal on behalf of all the people of the Bristol estates."

In the silence, Cyril took a piece of paper out his pocket, slowly unfolded it, and put on his reading glasses. He was really relishing this.

"The first person I have in mind," he announced, "is 76 years old. As far as I can calculate – and she can correct me if I'm wrong – she has no less than seven children, 18 grandchildren, nine great grandchildren, and two great-



great grandchildren – and every one of them a Special Category citizen living in one or other of the estates. I reckon she's as well qualified as anyone to accept this medal. And so I'd like to call on – Tammy Wheeler!"

A big cheer went up from one corner of the hall and many hands pushed forward a tiny old woman with wispy grey hair. When she got to the stage, Cyril bowed low to her and pinned her medal to her chest.

"You got the numbers wrong," was all she would offer for her acceptance speech. "It's ten great grandchildren and *three* great-great grandchildren."

"Typical bloody Deskies," someone shouted out. "All those computers and files and they still can't get their facts right!"

Everyone was starting to enjoy themselves again.

Next Cyril called up one Wolfgang Amadeus Tonsil. A large black man in a tight white suit and mirrored glasses, he wore a gold earring, a gold pendant, a gold wristband and – most impressive of all – when he opened his mouth he revealed a smile of solid gold. Again a big cheer went up as he came laughing and protesting up to the stage.

"Mr Tonsil, I name you Hero First Class, with a Special Commendation for Style," announced Cyril, pinning the medal to his chest.

"Well, some people have got it and some haven't," said Wolfgang Amadeus. "And that's all there is to it."

"And now I'd like to ask Mr Pedro Delaney of Daffodil Grove to come to the front. As far as I'm aware, Mr Delaney holds the record number of line offences of anyone in the Bristol Estates."

(By "Line offences" he meant violations of so-called Restriction Orders, which confine Special Category citizens to their home estate in lieu of prison sentences or fines.)

"Forty-three in all, according to my count," continued Cyril, as a tall, lanky, bashful man made his way up to the stage. "And in fact I believe that Mr Delaney is committing a line offence *at this very minute*, as he was placed on a two-month Restriction Order only a couple of weeks ago."

"Not two months, three," mumbled the very shy Pedro Delaney as Cyril pinned the medal to his shirt.

Cyril awarded another four medals.

"And now," he said, "before I finish, I'd just like to say a few words on one of my favourite subjects. And that subject is... mammoths."

There was a slightly incredulous laugh from most of the audience, though some of us Deskies knew that this was a subject dear to Cyril's heart.

"Everyone knows," Cyril said, "that one of the great achievements of modern science is our ability to bring back to life long-extinct species. And of all those many species, surely the most glorious is the mighty mammoth of the steppes, who you can now see alive and in the flesh here in the zoo in Bristol and in many other zoos.

"I sometimes wonder what it is like to be a mammoth in a zoo. Extinct for hundreds of thousands of years and then brought back to life again, not to roam the tundra

like its ancestors, but simply to provide entertainment to gaping crowds. What a strange fate!

"But one thing I want to tell you about mammoths is this. They are *big*. They are much bigger than mere elephants, as you can easily see in the zoo. But seeing them in the zoo doesn't do justice to their size. Everything looks smaller when it is shut up in a cage. It's only when you see a mammoth *out* of a cage that you understand just how enormous an animal it really is."

At the back of the hall the huge doors were pulled open. There were gasps and shrieks.

"Keep your hair on, everyone!" laughed Cyril. "He is really perfectly tame!"

An aisle had been left clear through the middle of the tables. Along it, led by a keeper, plodded a fully-grown bull mammoth, five metres tall, with tusks so immense that each of them, if it could have been uncurled, would have been six metres long at least.

Right up to the front of the room the mammoth walked. (It seems Cyril had hired the animal, God knows how, from some eccentric private collector.) Guests who'd been sitting next to the aisle jumped up from their seats to put some distance between themselves and the gigantic beast. There was a babble of excitement and incredulity, and some squeals of fear.

But more excitement was to come. When the creature reached the stage, Cyril himself climbed up onto its shaggy shoulders. Then, with him riding triumphantly aloft, the mammoth turned round again and marched ponderously back towards the door.

From out of the stunned silence there emerged applause, ragged and tentative at first and then a real ovation. Cyril waved his acknowledgement from on high and flung handfuls of medals out at the crowd. (He had had hundreds of small facsimiles made of the Hero First Class Star.)

More cheers!

And then the Pendants and the Wheelers and the Tonsils and all the rest of them fell in behind him and followed him outside. The TV people came after them, humping their cameras and their recording equipment. And off they went through the streets, all those scions of the Great Families of the Bristol estates, with helicopters circling above and police radios fretfully jabbering all around. In a long, loud procession they trailed merrily behind the welfare man on his anachronistic beast, through Redcliff and Broadmead and all about, in the mild midsummer night.

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Chris Beckett's most recent stories in *Interzone* were "The Marriage of Sky and Sea" (issue 153) and "The Gates of Troy" (issue 154). A former social worker, living in Cambridge, he is the author of many previous stories, including "La Macchina" (issue 46) and "The Welfare Man" (issue 74) – both of which were anthologized, the former in Gardner Dozois's *The Year's Best SF* and the latter in *The Best of Interzone*. The above new story is a free-standing sequel to "The Welfare Man."



# MUTANT POPCORN

Nick Lowe

Towards the end of his bodily tenure, Lafayette Ronald Hubbard imagined himself a film-maker. This wasn't entirely new; the great fantasist already had complete recall of past lives in which he had written a swathe of Hollywood hits of the 1930s (including *The Plainsman* and *Stagecoach*). But for a period in 1977-79 L. Ron became the prolific writer-director-producer of a series of Scientological dramas with titles like *The Unfathomable Man*, *The Problems of Life* and the legendary *Revolt in the Stars* – which brought to life the Church's secret history of how, 75,000,000 years in earth's past, "an evil ruler named Xenu massacred the populations of seventy-six planets, transported their frozen spirits back to earth

and exploded them in volcanoes" (synopsis from Russell Miller's delicious 1987 biography *Bare-Faced Messiah*). As a director, sadly, Ron's people skills lacked the effortless facility of his scriptwriting, and when disaffected crew threatened to shop him to the FBI he packed up his camera and went into hiding as a novelist instead, discharging his narrative batteries in the typewriter frenzy of effortless logorrhea that had always been his most verifiable talent. And so it was that, even with his own physical and mental health collapsing, the Feds closing in, and the Church falling under the iron control of a small circle of inner henchpeople, a million and a half words of staggeringly mediocre pulp sf managed to appear under the master's name before (and, mysteriously, after) he "discarded the body" in January 1986.

So it's a fitting completion of the circuit of creation that L. Ron's 1982 comeback epic *Battlefield Earth: A Saga of the Year 3000* is finally the movie it wanted to be from the first. Ron might, I think, have had mixed feelings about the end result, which doesn't reproduce his novelistic vision entirely faithfully. For one thing, it's dumped the final two-thirds (apart from the bit around pages 887-93 where our hero belatedly remembers to check whether he succeeded in blowing up the Psychlo homeworld a year earlier). Viewers of merely-mortal attention spans may welcome this concession, but it does make a mild nonsense of the title, as this is the part of the book where the human revolt goes fully global; while even those who made it through the novel's first third may feel a twinge of regret for the loss of the supporting tribe of Hollywood-accented Scotsmen with nobly savage dialogue like "I amna afeered of naething!"

Nevertheless, in the ways that matter, the movie version is a worthy memorial to its creator. Right from the opening minutes, you know you're in a

different kind of reality: a world where normal standards of narrative cohesion and cinematic competence no longer apply. Even more than the novel, Roger Christian's film version is an astonishing experience, like awakening in a parallel universe where the *Astounding* slushpile from 1945 has come lurching to life. Plotting, motivation and dialogue seem to have liberated themselves entirely from the constraints of obedience to man-animal logic. (I'd hoped to regale you, but my PDA full of quotes fell over in awe at its terrifying contents.) John Travolta as Terl captures the ineptitude of the most incompetent space villain in galactic history with such eerie accuracy you could believe he's been dimwitted, self-obsessed, and gullible all his life; and he's well-matched by Barry Pepper's incarnation of humanity's ludicrous champion Jonnie Goodboy Tyler, which captures perfectly the blond, chesty pool-attendant look that mankind's destiny demands.

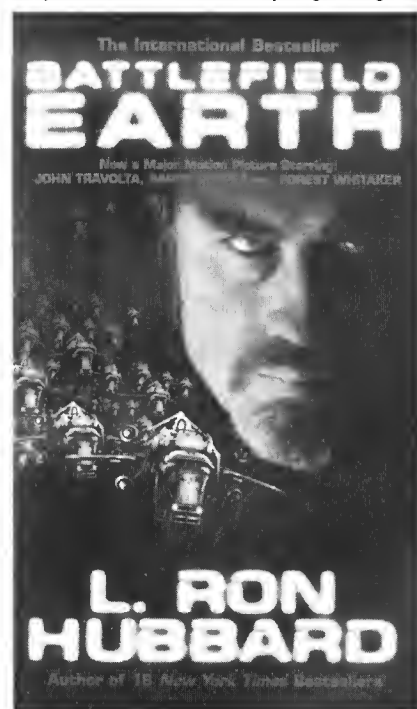
In fact, the supreme achievement of *Battlefield Earth's* movie incarnation is that it manages to be so much worse than a novel which many fondly believed to be as bad as anything could get. Yet this in itself is a tribute to the master's enduring legacy. His Church's remarkable grip on Hollywood is usually explained in terms of its creative-friendly pandering to self-dramatization, its imposition of firm narrative shape, structure, closure, and mechanizable procedure on the myths of psychoanalysis and the process of therapy. But while Ron's success undoubtedly did owe a lot to his life-long impatience with reality and his first-hand sense of the human appetite for instant gratification and guaranteed solutions, we shouldn't underrate the Church's open-armed tolerance of mediocrity. Scientology has always tended to have a refreshingly dampening effect on quality, discouraging negative criticism and accepting all production as "valid." With *Battlefield Earth*, this process has finally been let loose in a medium traditionally so hedged about with quality controls that it's hard to do anything at all. Not the smallest of *Battlefield Earth's* achievements is to produce something that bypasses these controls so completely, in a radical attempt to redefine the minimum standards of what audiences will accept.

What it doesn't much do is indoctrinate. The surprising thing about *Battlefield Earth* is that it's no more allegorical of Church dogma than is any other Hollywood movie of our age (and notably less than the three below). That's not to say it isn't steeped in Scientological culture: there's an authentic ring to the plot's obsession with surveillance, authority and "lever-

age" (Terl's driving concept in novel and film), and a telling touch of the late LRH in Terl's readiness to dump long-serving loyalists on a whim of convenience. But there's very little overt Churchiness, and you don't have to be an operating Thetan to see why. For reasons implanted deep in their common history, the Dianetic master narrative is *already* the foundation myth of all Hollywood plots: a spiritual quest for secrets buried in the past whose excavation will instantly resolve unhappiness, refocus life, and empower the individual capacity for heroism.

Take *Stir of Echoes*, the latest adaptation of another veteran pulpsmith turned spiritual guru, who in many ways is an image of what Ron might have become had he made a home in the real world. A figure of middling importance within itself, Richard Matheson was a hugely important boundary-crosser: not only the most successful genre author to cross over into screenwriting, but a committed New-Ager whose quasi-novelistic protreptics *The Path* and *What Dreams May Come* now draw a significant following in West America. And though Matheson himself was always too free a spirit to get sucked into the Dianetics quicksand, the plot of his 1958 novel *A Stir of Echoes* comes out of the same mixture of pulp plotting and period pop psychology, and follows much of the same narrative as the Clearing myth. It spins around a classic Matheson protagonist

Facing page and below: "...the supreme achievement of *Battlefield Earth's* movie incarnation is that it manages to be so much worse than a novel which many fondly believed to be as bad as anything could get."



– a first-person figure isolated in a paranoid solo reality – who discovers, after a hypnosis game unlocks an arsenal of psi sensitivities, that dark currents swim beneath the surface of his quiet suburban neighbourhood, and that pretty much everyone on the block is full of nasty sexual and/or homicidal secrets waiting to bubble up through the floor of the cellar.

David Koepp's film is surprisingly faithful to the novel's spirit and much of its structure, though it joins up the dots in a rather different pattern – with a different murder and a different victim, evidently to play down the novel's lurid demonization of all female characters outside the narrator's family (based openly on Matheson's own, down to the names of wife and small son). Instead, the movie makes much more of the child's inheritance of psychic powers, turning the plot into something of a precognitive prequel to *The Sixth Sense* – but with fewer pretensions, better scary bits, and none of the love-it-or-laugh-at-it narrative gimmick. True to the Matheson marque, it's humourless, earnest, highly effective melodrama, with a clumsy ending that manages to be at once mechanical and *ad hoc*. You have to go back to the novel to understand the orange juice, and Kevin Bacon is a bit prone to shirt-off moments to express his overwroughtness, but on the whole it's remarkably respectful of its master's voice (note the insistent closeups of the babysitter's choice of reading, the old Bantam edition of *The Shrinking Man*). The one thing it can't really capture is the 1950s setting, so essential to the story's darkness and feel that the film version comes over as merely a slick genre thrill. But that in itself is just what its respected author has built his career on delivering; and simply as a riff on the psychic-exorcism bassline, it's as solid and professional as anything of his own.

Or for a different generic take, there's *Final Destination*: essentially the same plot run through a teensploitation translator. Here too the hero is a troubled psychic trying to solve a paranormal mystery while all around shun him as weird or worse. But in this genre the universe is pre-shrunk to a class of high-school seniors and their parents and teachers, all sorted for death by stereotype, and executed in a series of gory slapstick-horror set pieces that can only be halted by the application of rigorous genre logic. In *Final Destination's* engaging premise, American youth's anxieties about passport ownership and overseas travel are confirmed by the mid-air explosion of the plane carrying the class trip to Paris; but death hasn't finished with young Alex and the small

circle of expendable friends he's inadvertently rescued by freaking out and getting them thrown off the plane.

Well, you can chuckle this off as above-par *Scream*-generation tat. But the thing that makes *Final Destination* a minor landmark in the evolution of cinema plotting is that it's the first film openly to make a movie villain out of death – not a personification, not an allegory, but the actual event, here credited with the plot attributes of a teen-horror villain, without any of the inconvenience of actual character. The principal conceit is that death behaves exactly like a Hollywood serial assassin, the only difference being that he's omniscient, omnipotent, impersonal and invisible. A bad guy distilled to his purest plot essence, death is simply an unseen but sentient antagonist who plays (conveniently) by a set of well-defined extrapolable rules, and if the prospective victims can only figure them out they can literally cheat death. (Fortunately, you can hear him coming a mile off; I doubt the John Denver who once sued the Pythons for their strangulation version of "Annie's Song" would have gone entirely along with his role as the reaper's favourite easy listening, but I daresay he wasn't

responding to attempts to contact.) You could found a religion on less, except that in effect the movie master-myth already has.

In contrast, over on the other side of international arrivals, there's a thrilling moment towards the end of Roman Polanski's *The Ninth Gate* – no, really, there is, though admittedly you have to sit through two hours of staggering tosh before touchdown – where the resolution fleetingly threatens to turn the tables on its genre in the most unAmerican way. At the climax of mercenary used-book dealer Johnny Depp's blood-spattered quest to complete the set of satanic etchings that will unlock the Devil's gate, it briefly looks as though the ultimate truth that awaits on the far side of the ninth gate is that there is no gate, no devil, no final black rite, and that the centuries-old secret society that has pursued this consummation from the new world (albeit in strictly second-unit shots, for obvious reasons) to the old is just a bunch of dirty old gits with more disposable income than hold on reality. For a brief, tantalizing moment you cast your mind back over the movie and realize that two hours

into a black-magic movie there's been not one demonstration of actual magic (unless you count the striking technique used by Mrs P descending a staircase). But then you grasp, with frightful certainty, that there is no way on earth that a film in this genre will allow any such ending, whatever the cost in logic, point, or audience satisfaction. And sure enough, the next five minutes move from perfect closure through the worst sex scene in modern cinema to an inept, witless, incoherent alternative resolution that only the most indomitable well-wisher could call daringly European.

*The Ninth Gate* comes from an untranslated Spanish novel, which might for all anyone knows have been quite good before Polanski got to work on it. As it is, it's neither pacey enough for Hollywood nor arty enough for Europe, and looks like tumbling out of the sky to oblivion in the featureless mid-Atlantic. It's a sad descent for a hero so mightily fallen; but as with other past masters of paranoia, the pull of the pulp plot is just too strong, and there's too much invested to allow the whole story to be exposed as a sad old man's flim-flam.

Nick Lowe

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# THE PLANET OF THE Stercorosaurs

*Barrington J. Bayley*

**T**he ochre sun was climbing into a sepia sky, its amber rays glancing through clouds tinted russet and umber. The tribe had roused itself and was making ready to follow the herd, eating the last of the food gathered the day before and gazing over the khaki landscape with its sparse buff and beige vegetation.

During the night the stercorosaur herd had moved. It was grazing close to the horizon, the huge dun and fawn forms of the beasts picked out in the russet light of dawn. The tribal elders scattered the ashes of last night's fire and picked up the tribe's two totems carved from dark brown stone: a figure of a stercorosaur, tail lifted, and a smaller figure of a girl child holding up a lump of dung in one hand.

Peter went to visit Mary. He found his way blocked by Ferdinand. Belligerently the bigger youth hunched his shoulders, his mouth and chin fringed with the brown crumbs of his early morning meal.

"Fancy Mary, do yer? Clear off and leave her alone. She's mine."

Peter craned his neck and tried to make eye contact with Mary. She sat on the ground, delicately licking the last of her breakfast from her fingers. She glanced in the other direction with a toss of her head, clearly enjoying the competition for her favours. Her parents paid no attention. They were shaking out the skins they had slept on.

Ferdinand was a well-muscled young man, clad in an

animal pelt, swinging a club negligently back and forth. Peter would never be able to beat him in a fight. He didn't have much to offer Mary, either. He wore no pelt. He had never been any good at trapping animals, and had to make do with a skirt of puce-coloured savannah-grass.

If he was to win Mary, he would have to use cunning.

Wordlessly he retreated. The tribe was beginning to trudge after the herd. Usually it had to move every day, simply because the herd had to move. Grazing was sparse. Khaki dust blew over the patches of herbage. Stercorosaurs spent nearly all their time feeding, demolishing one patch after another. Luckily they also needed water, just as people did, so they never strayed more than a few day's journey from the sluggish, meandering river.

The tribe could own only what it could carry. Shouldering water-bags, folding up sleeping skins, the men, women and children set off at a leisurely pace, looking forward to their next meal.

A plan formed in Peter's mind. The way to a young maiden's heart was through her stomach. For the past year or two the food had not been very good. Stercorosaurs did not breed very often, and currently the herd had no young, only aging adults. The pasture was dried-out and bereft of the more succulent plants. All this meant that the tribe had had to exist on food which was dry, rancid to the taste, and altogether unappetizing.

Peter knew that two days' travel to their rear a trib-

utary flowed into the river. Along that tributary another stercorosaur herd ranged, with its own attendant tribe.

That herd might have young.

It would be a difficult journey, for he had no food to take with him. Stercorasaurs were the only food animals, so there would be nothing on the way. He would go hungry, would have to risk collapsing from starvation before he reached his destination. Then, too, by custom tribes did not take each others' food – there was nothing to trade. He would have to steal it, and that was dangerous...

He quickly decided it was worth the risk.

He slipped to the rear, unnoticed by anyone, then dropped back and hid in a clump of spinebush. When the tribe was nearly out of sight, he set off in the opposite direction.

A trek to the riverbank would lose him valuable time. His water bag was about one third full; he would have to manage on that. Maybe he would come across a brackish pool, though that was unlikely.

The sombre splendour of dawn had faded. The ochre sun imbued the sky with a brown spectrum: serene amber, warm beige, restful buff, glowing russet. Then the rich smouldering browns, the deep browns, bay, puce, burnt sienna, shading into umber, and all interspersed with friable-seeming brown cloud. A warm, light wind blew up khaki dust. Taking his direction from the sun, Peter made an estimate and set off for a distant forest, a route that should take him to the tributary more quickly, though it was anyone's guess as to whereabouts along it the other herd might actually be.

Soon he was amid the tall stalks of the forest, with its maroon blooms. The undergrowth hindered him but little. Small flying creatures flitted from bloom to bloom and from stalk to stalk. He heard the rustle of forest animals, and once or twice glimpsed their fawn coats. Someone like Ferdinand was adept at trapping such animals and turning their pelts into clothing, sleeping blankets and water bags. Peter, though, was unlucky at the game. Before his traps caught anything the tribe invariably had to move on after the herd.

This time he did have some luck. Shortly after midday he heard a rippling sound. Following it, he discovered a spring flowing from between the roots of a broad, gnarled stalk, giving rise to a brooklet which disappeared into damp, matted undergrowth. He quenched his thirst, filled his bag, and went on.

Night came. He settled himself in a thicket for protection against the chill breeze, gathering ferns and spreading them under him. He could not sleep at first. A cruel sense of isolation assailed him. From all around came the clickings and beepings of night creatures, a cold, pitiless chorus. Longingly he thought of the now-distant tribe gathered round the campfire, telling stories, dancing, talking among themselves. He could have been there now! How cheery and welcoming compared with this!

And then he thought of Mary, with her delightful face, her pert young breasts, her exciting hips – clad, he reminded himself furiously, in a pelt which was a gift

from Ferdinand!

The thought renewed his determination. Her face hovering before his imagination, he drifted off to sleep.

He was awakened by the sepia light of sunrise filtering between the stalks. Hunger gnawed at his stomach. He took no heed of the various fruits which grew nearby, food to the forest animals but which he, of course, could not eat. He paused to fashion a box out of leaves, twisting a carrying handle from fern, and then continued his journey. The afternoon of the second day saw him emerge from the forest. Spotting a tall, scraggy hill, he climbed it to get his bearings. The tributary he sought wandered its way across the landscape in the middle distance. There was no sign of the stercorosaur herd.

Weary from his exertions, Peter lay down to rest, and despite himself fell into a doze. The sun was low when he woke. Scanning the landscape again, he thought to see a group of long shadows near the horizon. Then, straining his eyes, he just managed to make out the objects which cast them, their puce hue barely distinguishable from the dusty earth.

Stercorasaurs!

The following tribe wasn't visible. It must be camped over horizon.

He set off at once, running down to the foot of the hill to go loping in the direction of sinking sun. A plan was once more forming in his mind. He would sneak among the herd after dark, when none of the tribe would be about. As he came closer he took advantage of what little cover there was, darting from clump to clump and from stalk to stalk, then stopped, waiting for the light to fade.

Sunset was a brown study when he eventually approached the herd. Joy! It was larger than his own tribe's, and it contained a number of young, some of them surely not long from the egg. He crawled forward on his belly, enjoying the sight of the big stercorasaurs with their long, flexible tails, their column-like legs which were taller than a standing man, and their small heads atop sinuous necks fully as long as the tails. Piles of dung lay over a wide area. Peter soon found himself concentrating on three young pups which were devouring vegetation with all the avidity of the recently born. His heart leaped as he saw one squirt excrement on to the ground in an amber stream.

He thought of Mary, and the expression on her face when he showed it to her.

He could wait no longer. Not waiting for the sun to disappear, he crawled among the huge stercorasaurs. From all around him came their low mooing calls and the rumbling of their busy intestines. Their rich, earthy, musty odour assailed him, mixed with the pungent dung-smells which drifted over the dusty ground. He paused to satisfy his hunger at a still-warm, steaming brown heap, then crawled on until he arrived at the new pup excreta. He dipped a finger, and tasted it.

Exquisite! The taste was almost indescribable, a blend of delicious flavours. It was almost liquid now, but soon it would cool to a syrupy consistency, and it would stay fresh for days. Peter laid the leaf-box he had made

on the ground and hurriedly began scooping the pup-dung into it.

The box was almost full when a shadow fell across him. Startled, he looked up. A pelt-clad, sturdy young man stood over him. For a mad instant he thought it was Ferdinand, so close was the resemblance, but no, it was a stranger. A member of the *other* tribe.

Peter climbed warily to his feet, folding down the lid of the leaf-box and hitching the carrying-cord over his left shoulder alongside that of his water-bag. The tribesman hunched his shoulders and scowled.

"oo are you? I don't know *you*."

Bewilderment was replaced by a slowly dawning realization. "You're not one of us!"

"I was hungry," Peter said defensively.

The tribesman blinked as he looked from Peter to the yellowish deposit, then back again.

"Well, go and eat yer own dung!"

Then he launched himself at the smaller Peter, who went sprawling, desperately trying not to spill his cargo of pup-dung. The other's fists pummelled him. With a strength born of panic, he managed to jerk a knee up into his attacker's testicles.

The young tribesman emitted a squawk and curled up, hugging himself. Surprised at his success, Peter scrambled to his feet and ran for all he was worth, not attempting to hide now, not looking back for fear the rest of the tribe was in hot pursuit. He did not stop until he was out of breath and could run no more. Looking back, he saw the last of the sun disappear, leaving the horizon shading from deep brown to rich black. The hulking forms of the stercorasaur stood placidly.

There was no one between him and the herd.

A thin trail of pup-dung drops betrayed the path he had taken. Tutting over the loss, he did his best to repair the leak, then he was off again, making for stalk forest.

As soon as it was light he made a second box and transferred his stolen delicacy into it, licking clean the old leaves. The return journey took longer than the outward one, for the tribe had moved on, but throughout the three days it took Peter ate nothing, patiently enduring an empty stomach. Everything was for Mary.

It was dark when he spotted the light of the tribe's campfire in the distance. The tribe had settled round it, sitting on the ground, listening to the litany which was recited every ten days. On a makeshift earth dais the two tribal totems glinted in the firelight: the statue of a stercorasaur and beside it the statue of the little girl.

Sidling in, sitting out in the shadows, Peter found himself listening, as he had so many times, to the tale of the tribe's beginnings, told by the eldest male as was the custom. The oldster described how in the beginning the first tribe – which now had split into as many as five – had fallen to earth from the sky, in a big shining egg which had crashed and smashed open. Before that, people had lived in another world, like this one some ways, in other ways different.

The old man's face grew animated. "They could not go back. They had to stay here. Now in the other world

people ate plants and animals. So they started to eat the plants and the animals, every plant and animal they could gather or kill. It was no use. Either they were poisonous, or they passed straight through and had no food value. Nothing that lived here would sustain human life."

The elder raised both hands and shrugged gloomily. "There was some food the people had brought with them in the crashed egg, and so they eked that out for as long as they could. They had brought seeds, too, but when they planted the seeds they would not grow. The soil was not right. It was not the same as the soil on the other world. The people despaired as they realized they would all have to die of starvation. Once the food was gone they grew weaker and weaker, thinner and thinner, and then they began dying."

The listeners hung their heads, tears coming from the more sensitive as they heard once again of the tribulations of their ancestors. "One day," the oldster went on softly, "an exhausted mother and father opened their eyes to see their little girl, scarcely more than a toddler, eating some stercor dung she had found lying on the ground. They stopped her at once. 'Don't do that! That's dirty! That's nasty! That's bad!' To them, you see, dung of any kind was disgusting, just as our own is to us. Then they found that while everyone else grew weaker, the girl child grew stronger. Furthermore, she dropped dung of her own, and it was healthy, the product of digestion!

"Yes, by some instinct that innocent child had proved to be our saviour. She had discovered what we now know, that the dung of the stercor is the only substance on this world that can sustain human life. No other animal's dung is of any use at all. The stercor alone so transforms the food it eats that what it leaves behind is food for us."

The tribe did not like stercorasaur dung at first, the old man explained. The smell and taste were disgusting, to eat it utterly repulsive, and only desperation could bring them to preserve their lives in this way. But over time their palates changed. They came to appreciate the subtle flavours. The sweet, heavenly tang of soft, runny pup-dung with its nearly yellow hue. The milder but ambrosial beige dung of the adolescent stercorasaur. The chomping enjoyment that came from devouring the darker dung of the adult, sharper from the bull than from the cow. Then there was the stodgy staple fare the tribe had been forced to live on for some time past, odorous and acrid.

Nor could one forget the variations due to the type and lushness of the vegetation the herd encountered, nor the effect of seasonal changes. To the educated palate, stercor dung was unlimited in texture and flavour!

Peter slid back into the invisibility of darkness. The litany finished, people began wandering to where they had laid out their sleeping skins. He saw Mary walking with Ferdinand, and watched as they came to her family's campsite. The two talked for a while, Ferdinand swaggering back and forth as he clumsily attempted to court Mary. Then, after repeated glances from her parents, he bid her goodnight.

Luckily for Peter they had chosen a sleeping plot on

the margin of the tribe's camp. Out in the darkness, he lay down in a fern clump and waited till he heard snores. Then he edged forward and called out as softly as he could.

"Mary! Mary!"

He waited, fearing he would rouse her parents. Then a small, slim, female form rose, paused to wrap a pelt around her middle, and crept towards him.

In the faint starlight he saw her frown as she recognized his face. "Peter!" she hissed. "What do you want?"

He beckoned her further away, then opened the leaf box. "Smell this."

Pleasure suffused her face as she took a deep sniff. The sweet foetid aroma filled the warm night air.

"Go on," he whispered. "Taste it."

Shyly but eagerly, she dipped her finger in the now-cool goo and took it to her lips. A sigh escaped her as she sucked.

"Luscious!"

"It's for you, Mary. It's a present."

Taking her by the elbow, he hurried her further into the night. She half-ran with him, unresisting.

"Where did you get it?" she gasped.

"I stole it from another tribe. I've been away for five days. I nearly starved. I did it all for you, Mary. I love you."

Well away from the others, they knelt down. He

encouraged her to plunge her hand into the leaf box and scoop of the pup-dung, filling her mouth with it. Her face was pure enjoyment as she scooped again and again, her eyes close, unashamedly rolling the delicious treat round her mouth and letting it trickle down her throat.

"Mmmmmmm. Mmmmmmmmm..."

Suddenly remembering her manners, she opened her eyes and offered him the box. Peter instead took her face in his hands and kissed her. She squirted the sloppy luxury from her mouth into his. Now it was happening. They passed the gooey dung back and forth, mixing it with their saliva. Peter exulted. He had succeeded. He had won. Mary was his. She would never accept the dull, oafish Ferdinand now.

Quietly, lest they attract attention, they laughed. With complete abandon they rolled together on the ground, spewing the gourmet luxury into each others' mouths, mashing lips and tongues together, smearing stercor pup dung all over each others' faces and licking it off.

Life was sweet.

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**Barrington J. Bayley** is a veteran of British science fiction, having contributed to various magazines since the 1950s and written numerous novels since 1970. His most recent stories in *Interzone* were "A Crab Must Try" (issue 103) and "The Crear" (issue 110). He lives in Donnington, near Telford, Shropshire.

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# Mean Time in Greenwich

*Elizabeth Counihan*

While I was examining the graffiti on the wall of my cell at the local copshop, the door clanked open and two people came in. They didn't look like mets. The man had a sharp suit, a little moustache and spats. The woman was an icy blonde like in one of those really old movies, which was a very now thing in Euroland. That's how I knew for sure where they came from although she claimed they were Brits. It seemed like I had been all alone in that cell for hours, listening to the police com arguing it out with the run-down AI that was all I got for legal aid, so it was nice to see some real people.

"How nice to meet you, Ms Jenkins. You may call me Eve, and this is Jonah," she said. She waved her hand at the babbling AIs, and they wailed and went blank. For a minute I thought the Euro pair were real live briefs, so I smiled my most innocent smile.

"Call me Lizard," I said. "All me mates do. Ms Jenkins is like, intimidating, innit?"

Jonah leant against the wall and lit up a gasp. He looked at me like he'd scraped me off of his shoes. "Intimidating? That's a long word. Not usually part of the vocabulary of girls from the criminal classes. Where did you learn a long word like that?"

"I dunno, school I guess. And I int a girl, I'm 22. What's it to you, anyway?"

Jonah glanced at his flash, Euro wristcom. "That would be a convent school, wouldn't it? Little Sisters of Diana, it says here. Scholarship eh? So you had a good education."

"Yes, I s'pose so. But it don't get you a job," I answered. "Can you talk Standard English?" asked the woman.

"Yeah, I learned Standard and Estry. But of course I talk Estry round here like everyone else. Do you think I want my head kicked in for talking toff?"

She flashed me a shiny smile.

"You know, er... Lizard, you've got a record – soliciting, fencing, ABH..."

"No I fuckin int," I objected. "It was Aggravated Harassment. I only hit the buggar with a tomato..."

"But it is, nevertheless, a criminal record, my dear. And this time... I can't think of an innocent excuse for climbing into an upper window at Buckingham Palace..."

"I couldn't afford to pay the entrance..."

"At midnight, using sucker pads and monofilament?"

"Yeah, it was for a bet."

That was when Jonah mentioned Mandy's and I started to get scared. Okay, so I had done some cat-burgling among other things, but I always thought Mandy's was strictly for the real villains, the ones who had been through all the biosocial rehab, hypno-aversion therapy, vicars etc. and were left with just lock'em-in-and-throw-away-the-key. There were a lot of seriously nasty people at Mandy's, so I had heard. I felt a bit funny and my vision went black around the edges. Next thing I knew Eve sat me down and made me put my head between my knees.

"We want to help you, my dear," she cooed, handing me a glass of water. "And there may be a way out of this

tricky situation.”

Jonah looked at me over his little moustache. “Are you loyal to King and Country?” he demanded, cold as a fish.

“Oh, yes, ever so loyal,” I replied in top-sincerity mode. He took a step towards me and crouched down. “And can you keep your mouth shut?” he breathed into my eyeball. I nodded.

“Now don’t bully the child, Jonah,” said Eve. “You see His Majesty has a problem, and Jonah and I have been charged with finding a loyal citizen who might be able to help.”

After that they grilled me about my murky past from when I’d been registered, Eliza Branwyn Jenkins, 22 July 2020 right up to the present day. Jonah checked with his wristcom and Eve seemed satisfied with my answers, only she said I was to talk Standard to show I could, so I did. Jonah rattled on about my school grades and why didn’t I go on to higher education after school as I was so bright etc. So I had to explain like I was talking to a four-year-old about the economic state of the country and how did he think my Mum could afford the fees.

Then Eve said, “*Parlez vous français?*” – only it took me a minute to understand her because she sounded like a real frog, not like Sister Mary Worldpeace at school. I wished they would get to the point, so I told Eve I couldn’t remember any sodding Eurogabble and didn’t want to, but I didn’t think she believed me. She smiled sweetly and said that it would be a good idea if I remembered it *toute de suite*, i.e. stat, as well as everything else I’d learned as I would need them where I was going; a quick trip if I helped His Majesty out of his spot of bother or a long stretch at Mandy’s – it was up to me. So of course I had to say yes.

After that they whisked me off to this country house outside London to “be briefed,” as Eve called it. I got shown lots of holos and vids of a kid Jonah called “The Subject.” And seeing how Eve kept on about talking Standard and using the right fork at mealtimes it didn’t need a genius to work out that the kid was a Royal, although I hadn’t a clue which one, as I never bothered watching the Hello Channel when we had a TV.

The kid was about twelve and looked permanently bored. But he had done a TV interview for an old folks’ chat show and after seeing it, I didn’t think he could be all bad. He had been allowed to appear on the programme because the interviewer was one of his relations, an elderly Royal who had been in show business. The kid said he wanted to go back to England and see what it was really like. The old boy muttered something about “getting a decent education” but the Subject had said that arseing about in Euroland was not the kind of education that was any good for him, only he put it more diplomatically.

The other pictures were of Mandy’s – holomaps of the whole place with special attention to all the ins and outs, several of which had been forgotten by the time it was made into a prison.

They were definitely in a hurry and wanted me out on the job ASAP. I was enjoying myself - totalling royal-

style grub, being the centre of attention, enjoying the country air, cute bunny-rabbits etc., so I tried not to learn too fast. But I had only been there a couple of days when Eve had me and Jonah into her office and Jonah asked was I ready to swear an Oath to say I would never divulge what they were going to tell me, so I swore it under duress and with my fingers crossed which made it invalid although I don’t think they realize to this day.

They told me that “the Subject” was the Prince of Wales, Heir Apparent to the throne – the apparent bit means he gets to be King of the UK when King William finally chokes on his oysters. Eve said his name, which began George Arthur Frederick and went on like a shopping list until I lost count. I asked which name to call the poor little bugger and she looked down her nose and said, “Your Royal Highness.”

So what all the fuss was about was that the Prince had been on an official visit to the ancestral Capital but had managed to persuade his Special Branch minders to let him see a bit of the real London and he had demanded to be taken to Mandy’s. He must have had it all planned because no sooner was he pressing the flesh of a few selected prisoners than, allegedly, his pet dog escaped into the throng and he had chased after it and disappeared among the great unwashed. Numerous wailing nannies and gun-toting heavies dashed after him but never found a trace. Or so Eve told me.

“Funny, I never saw nothing about it on the newscreens and I never heard it was on TV,” I commented. Eve said nothing so I smiled and added.

“Makes Special Branch look a bit pathetic, yeah? Head in the sand followed by egg in the face? However did they fuck up like that? S’pose you and Jonah’s Specials int you?”

Jonah went red and mumbled something about every organization having its rotten apples. Even the ice maiden blushed. So, he had used some of the royal mega-euros to corrupt the incorruptible. Minders had turned blind eyes and were now, doubtless, sunning themselves under aliases, soaking up the ultra-violet in tax-free Antarctica. And of course, the Authorities didn’t want us plebs to know they had screwed up. And he liked dogs. The Kid continued upwards in my estimation.

“Agents were sent in of course,” Eve said, “but there were communication difficulties...”

I smirked. I could just imagine them all twittering away in Standard or even French – couldn’t divulge their shameful secret and ask the mets to sort out the prisoners and find the Kid, and none of their own people able to talk Estry like real Londoners.

“This is not a laughing matter,” Jonah said. “We have learned that His Royal Highness is in considerable danger,”

Eve interrupted. “One of our agents emerged yesterday. He had been tracing the signal from the Prince’s Personal Identity Chip when he was attacked by a gang of prisoners. He was interrogated by their leader and the nature of his investigations discovered. He was returned to us bearing a package.” She paused for

emphasis. "It contained a blood-stained PIC and a note which read 'The Kid is safe but will not be if you do not meet our demands. Await instructions. Signed The Pig.' It has been confirmed that the PIC and the blood were those of His Royal Highness."

My job was to find young Wales and bring him out. Just like that. On account of I was (a) a Londoner, (b) a "daring and dangerous criminal" (which was bollocks) and (c) was "of above average intelligence and education for my class." And what with the Pig's note, things were getting a mite urgent. So they issued me a communicator in a hair piece matched to my hair (which I had in Midnight and Sunrise stripes that month). And they fitted me with the latest in French hitek, a "gluteal PIC," which meant a Special Branch nurse told me to think of England and then fired it into my bum. Eve said it was undetectable except by the coded homing device – well, not to me it wasn't.

And that was it. I was all trained up to die for the United Kingdom of England and Wales with the emphasis on die and the rest of Europe doubtless looking on and thanking God for the small mercy that we weren't part of their outfit any more so they could have a good laugh at our expense. I blame my grandparents and everyone else who voted for that guy with the Spanish name, the one who took us out of Euroland all those years ago. The Scots and the Irish didn't put up with the situation for long – good on them – but we English got lumbered didn't we?

The day I went down to Mandy's wasn't a nice day for sight-seers unless you were a hippo. The sky emptied itself over our heads and straight into the khaki Thames. Eve and Jonah pretended to be a couple of regular mets and drove me to the Prison Reception on the north bank. I wore lag's gear – blue denims and shirt straight out of the last century, but luckily for me, I got to keep my wooden clogs. There wasn't a real plan of action. I was just to say I was in for cat-burgling and GBH and mingle socially. Eve reckoned that as there weren't that many kids inside I should be able to find out what had happened to The Subject. Other than that, I was on my own. But just before getting out of the car to take me to reception she handed me a stubby-looking metal tube. It had a picture of feathers and a motto in some weird lingo underneath.

"This is His Royal Highness's laser-foil," she said. She must have seen me look baffled. "The sport isn't generally known in the UK yet. The Prince is a very talented player and it is to be hoped that by the time laser-fencing becomes recognized for the Olympics, His Royal Highness will be old enough to represent the UK. Show him this and it will establish your credentials, but it's unlikely anyone in the prison will know what it is. And now *au revoir et bon chance, chérie*."

I joined a group of around ten handcuffed villains and a couple of bored-looking mets who brightened up a bit when they saw I was female. We were shepherded into the skycar and a few moments later we were swaying

over the Thames on our way to Mandy's. The seasoned lags looked nervous, perhaps with good reason as the old cable car was creaking horribly, but in spite of the weather I rather enjoyed the view of Canary Wharf and the statue of Cool Britannia. I think Britannia is supposed to be our answer to the Statue of Liberty, but she always reminds me of a fat lady holding an ice cream. That day one of her eyelights wasn't working, so she was winking like a wicked old whore.

Then I turned around and caught sight of the prison. Rain was thudding on the parts of Mandy's that still had a roof. Some of the masts were bent and others were missing altogether. It looked like a giant circus tent that had seen better days. But there were observation towers all round and there must have been an electric net or something across the bend of the river because I could see something glowing through the murky water. The word was that they had man-eating sharks or maybe it was barracudas trapped in there in case any lag was foolish enough to try to swim for it. The cable car swooped down over the double perimeter fences which I could see sparking blue every so often as the rain caught them. It didn't look safe. We lurched to a halt.

"Here we are, lady and gentlemen," said one of the mets. "Home from home." The other one pushed me out of the car before I had time to kick him in the groin.

Being handcuffed I couldn't even rub the sore place on my bottom where Eve had had the nurse stick the gluteal PIC and where the bastard met had just pinched me.

"Fuck you, Eve, and all fucking coppers," I said just loud enough for her to pick it up on the com.

There was quite a crowd waiting for us behind the fence. They spat and threw things at the mets and looked as ugly a crowd of villains as you could wish to avoid. I saw that hardly any were wearing the regulation gear and those that did had decorated the denims with all manner of bits of torn blanket, beads and wet, sad-looking feathers. One even had a set of Christmas tree lights flashing round his neck. Nearly all of them had painted faces. One of the mets held them off with an automatic while the other unlocked the gate, uncuffed us and shoved us through it. The inmates pelted the police with stones, which dinned harmlessly against the wire; ditto the gobs of spit which got fried by the electrics. But one true piss artist succeeded in directing a stream through the mesh and, I'm pleased to report, treated the sex-harassing cop the way a dog treats a lamp-post. The gate slid shut.

The crowd stopped bawling at the mets and several men ran forward to greet newly-arrived friends. I half hoped that they would ignore me, but with a one to four ratio of women to men in Mandy's there was no chance of that, so I had to do a bit of dodging and diving. It was still pelting with rain. The ground was mostly mud and puddles, though I could see one or two patches of the old tarmac around. There was a nasty smell wafting in from the Thames. I guess the plumbing at Mandy's hadn't been fixed since the year 2001. The man-eaters in the river must be suffering even worse than I was. People

were making for shelter and I followed shivering.

The hard plastic stuff the original builders had used for the walls of the Millennium Dome had deteriorated – what with age, the weather and vandalizing prisoners. To get in you had to walk around until you reached one of the entrances. There were plenty of them, many just areas where the wall had been ripped out. Only trouble was each doorway had a painted sign over the top and two or three lounging thugs on guard. The idea seemed to be you had to belong to a particular gang to get inside.

After wandering around in the rain, so that I had mud up to my knees, I saw one open door and no one in sight, so I crept inside. There was a curtain barring my way. All of a sudden the curtain was parted by a massively huge black hand and then a big bald head like a giant football. About seven foot of African Brit followed. He grabbed both my wrists in one hand so I kicked him in the balls with every ounce of strength. He giggled girlishly and said in a high voice:

“You wastin’ your time doin’ that, chicky. Int you never heard of the Angelic Soul Singers?” Too right I had – the infamous and bollockless followers of some old singing perv who liked big boys with girlie voices, just like they used to hundreds of years ago.

“Come along with Old Harry,” he squeaked. “I got lots of friends who’d just love to meet you. Only they int religious,” He giggled again. Then I had an idea. I relaxed, smiled up at him.

“Well, Brother, I too, am of the Faith,” I lied. “But although I have heard tell of you god-fearing folk, I surely have never heard one of you singing in praise and joy unto the Lord.” He took the bait, folded his hands prayerfully (releasing my wrists) and lifted his voice in praise etc.

It was a hell of a high kick, but thanks to my time with Madam Cynthia’s High Steppin’ Strumpets I clogged him in the throat before he reached his first hal-lelujah. As he collapsed, wheezing, I dived through the opening in the curtains behind him and found myself in the huge, dimly-lit and vile-smelling interior of Mandy’s.

I was too busy trying to get away from Harry to take much notice of my surroundings. There should have been plenty of electricity, what with the Thames Dam being so near but I guess a fuse must have blown, most likely years back, and no one had got around to fixing it; so as far as I could make out the only light came from smoky torches plus what dripped in with the rain through the holes in the roof. The result was when I tried to run I kept barging into semiconscious lags sprawled on the ground. They stank of meths and zonkweed. By the time my eyes adjusted, I could hear Harry, snorting like a buffalo and trampling his mates underfoot to get to me. I zigzagged in the direction of the middle of the prison, dodging wandering figures; some of them seemed to glow in the dark. There was a droning background noise, echoing shouts and far away in the shadows a dog barked. I wished it could have been my dear old dog, Maxi – funny how often I still thought of him.

Twisting away from a man who tried to grab me, I glanced back. Harry was still in full stampede. After what seemed ages of pelting through the gloom, I saw a

milling crowd, back-lit by a glowing plastic rainbow. I dashed towards them. So did Harry. Just as I got ready to lose myself among the flickering figures, a ray of pink light revealed a piece of torn plastic sheeting right in my path. I tried to jump it, but tripped. I heard Harry squeal triumphantly as I fell mudwards; then a sound like a mattress falling from a great height. Someone took my hand and pulled me to my feet.

A whisper. “Come on, quick. He’ll be up in a jiff. This way.” A tall girl in a long skirt, but very agile with it. She dragged me behind the rainbow screen – real electric lights this side, seen through a haze of zonky smoke. We avoided the numerous staggering weedheads and jumped over the horizontal ones. We ducked round the remains of a huge electric fan and over more chunks of coloured plastic and then up a sharp incline, until I was gasping.

“Come on!” said my saviour. She yanked me up and up until I was dizzy. She turned towards me. We were back in semi-darkness but the faint, green glow coming from her skin enabled me to realize that her face looked vaguely familiar.

“Here,” she said, shoving a rope into my hand. She indicated a platform a fair squint across from the walkway. I looked down. Rainbow lights and tiny people.

“No!” I said. One of the tiny people wasn’t so tiny. Harry!

“Go,” she said.

I went.

We had swung across space like two trapeze artistes and were now on a platform which I suddenly realized was on the elbow of a gigantic, seated statue. We were at least 20 metres above ground.

“What the fuck is this?” I spluttered.

“Keep your head down,” said the girl. “Harry won’t have seen us cross – too dark. We just have to climb down inside Kinky and we’ll be safe.” She ducked through a small hatchway in the giant elbow.

“There used to be kind of Siamese twins here when this place was still the Body Zone, but Kinky is all that’s left to remind us.” I didn’t have to ask the reason for the figure’s name for as we exited through a doorway between its buttocks I saw a) that its sex was neither here nor there and b) that it wore only a pair of thigh-length boots

“You want to hang around this zone. Safest place in Mandy’s. I’m in charge around here actually,” she said shyly, and added: “Us girls must stick together mustn’t we?”

I must have looked doubtful. She appeared quite hurt.

“I’m not a dyke you know. Don’t you recognize me?” And then I remembered where I had seen that droopy-eyelidded, high-cheekboned face; on TV, above a body strapped into a pair of retro-Gaultier conical lactating diamante tits.

“Georgy Girl?” I queried.

“Yeah. That was me. Highest paid super-model in Britain, and I did pretty well in Europe too. Well, that’s all shit under the bridge now... I fucked up.” She, or rather he, fluttered his eyelashes tragically. That explained the height and the toff accent.



"Didn't you hear about it? I got caught trying to blow up Dolly's Sheep Factory last year. But life goes on, sweetie, and I'm recruiting new members to Youth for Animal Purity every day."

Thanks to Georgy, I had come to the right place to begin my search. There were half a dozen kids hanging around. When I asked George about them he said some belonged to prostitutes here in the Body Zone, but there were lots more who no one knew about, and this particular group liked to hang around the animal rightists. Some of the women eyed me up suspiciously, but I acted butch and made it clear I wasn't interested in competing for trade. I noticed there were a number of dogs and puppies around the place, which George said were attached to the animal rights kids. I cursed myself; not having asked to see a picture of the Subject's dog made me nearly as incompetent as Eve and co. Once I got the chance to be on my own I would call her up on the com and ask for a description.

By this time it was properly dark outside. I was famished and glad when someone passed me a dish and said we were going to eat. We crouched inside Kinky and ate by candlelight. The food smelt like very old burger and it glowed faintly. The women and children tucked in but the dogs weren't keen. The animal rightists wouldn't eat it at all. George, called the stuff "mad cow pie." Allegedly it had been stored under the site of one of the old nuclear reactors for about 50 years until someone came up with the bright idea of using it to feed the prisoners in Mandy's. He advised me that at least the water was clean as it came straight off the roof through the original conduits. After I had swilled my mouth out, I admitted to Georgy that I was a bit of an animal nutter myself, told him about poor Max and then I remembered how he looked at me at the vets; and before I knew it a couple of genuine, fat tears had slid down my nose, which added to my cred. So I was welcomed into the gang with open arms.

Another of the group, a very young man with the beginnings of a fluffy beard smiled sympathetically. "It's vegetables tomorrow so we get to eat... you know the monthly leek cull," he said. I looked blank and he stared at me like I was stupid.

"Giant gene-spliced leeks... threatening the Snowdonia National Park. Taste quite good boiled up with zonkweed."

I turned to George. "Sorry I never knew about your brave action against the cloners, only I don't have a TV." Then I added casually: "But I did hear there was a lag here called 'The Pig.' Is he one of your lot?"

The effect was dramatic. They all looked ready to vomit.

"He's our sworn enemy, the leader of Beast Pride," George said. "The arch-profaner of animal purity." And he refused to say another word on the subject.

I went to bed hungry but was lulled to sleep by Georgy, quietly telling the kids the old panto story about the first London Mayor and his faithful newt.

Next day my enquiries were no further on, so I elected

to go along to collect our share of the Welsh superveg. Most of the inhabitants of the Body Zone joined in, and I took the opportunity to observe some of the kids as we all converged on the centre of the dome, but I couldn't see one answering to the description of HRH. This lot reminded me of the Baker Street kids from the Sherlock Holmes Show, dressed in all manner of clothes that didn't fit and dirty as hell. I petted their dogs and asked the oldest one, a gangly youth called Smiffy, if kids kept dogs in the other zones. (I still hadn't had a chance to call Eve on the doggie ident). He chortled and pointed at one of the other kids, a girl dressed in her mother's skirt plus a Redskin head-dress.

"Ask Tart here. Her dog nearly got added to someone's cow stew before she got here." Tart clutched at her own tubby little pooch and scowled at me like I was guilty of doggicide.

By the time we had made the brisk trot to the middle of Mandy's a big crowd of prisoners was already waiting, their faces cranked skywards. Apart from our group, there were no children and very few women. I noticed that George was glaring angrily at half a dozen shaven-headed men who were half-crouching under the central opening. The men turned towards us and growled like beasts.

A helicopter droned overhead and we were suddenly showered with onion-smelling disks the size of car wheels. Some of the dozier lags were felled and lay senseless beneath the avalanche. Smiffy blew on a tin bugle and all the kids dashed forward and made off with as many leek disks as they could carry. Scuffles broke out as each man fought for his dinner heedless of those trampled under foot. Tart, the girl with the feather head-dress, was bowling her disk along. I could see the name 'Monsanto' in green on the white pith, like it was a wobbly bit of Brighton rock. Her dog and one of the puppies tore at the ankle of one shaven-headed felon as he tried to steal it. Two of George's terrorists turned on him, beating him to the ground with utter ferocity. As he fell I saw the words "Beast Pride" tattooed on his forehead. In the middle of the pandemonium who should call me up but Eve.

"What's going on, *cherie*, we have heard nothing. England expects results..."

"Fuck off, I'm busy," I said as I karate chopped another member of Beast Pride. She continued to twitter at me but I couldn't hear a word what with all the shouts, curses and dog's chorus, plus another load of leeks emptying on our heads like heavyweight manna from heaven. A chorus of horrid roars, bellows and grunts erupted from the Beast Pride group. Some went on all fours. Others jumped about like monkeys.

"Who are those motherfuckers?" I gasped to Smiffy.

"Worse than that," he said. But before he could explain further a great form rose up from behind the beast-men and floated above them, a balloon in the shape of a rampant pink pig. George's people made a concerted charge at Beast Pride, who started to retreat towards the far side of Mandy's. I made to follow, but

George grabbed my shoulder. I struggled to get away.

"They're the Pig's men, aren't they?" I gasped.

He looked troubled. "You aren't turning traitor, sweetie?"

"No... trust me. A child's life is in danger. I swear... on my dog Maxi. I have to see the Pig."

"Your choice then, sweetie. But you'll end up pig swill..." He let go and I started in pursuit of the beast-men. Smiffy and his Baker Street lookalikes ran after me. Curly, a little fellow of about six, implored me not to go and Tart offered her protection. I nearly laughed till I saw she meant it, so I chuckled her dog under the chin and lengthened my stride until I had left even Smiffy behind.

As I approached the far side of Mandy's I could see the pig balloon sagging against the ruins of a round building. The loping, crawling and galloping beast-men were disappearing under an archway. There was no direct light here but I could just about see where the original name of the zone had been replaced with the slogan "Bestiality Rules" painted in what I hoped was only red paint. I took advantage of the gloom and after a short wait, I followed. We were in a large open space where the smell of animal sweat plus zonkweed was overpowering. The beast men were getting really excited, squealing and throwing bits of leek around. I crept in behind the last of them and sidled along the periphery until I was able to hide behind what looked like a huge fish tank.

There was a cacophony of squealing and growling and almost immediately a procession entered the room on the far side, led by four or five men wearing animal masks but still managing to smoke weed. Finally a large bull-man wheeled a cart groaning under the mass of blubber I immediately identified as the leader himself.

The Pig heaved his bulk off the cart and, grunting, settled on the throne and adjusted his pink-paper crown. His henchbeasts took adjacent chairs. He held up a hand for silence.

"Brother beasts. Our hour of trial is at hand. Our enemies are at the gates..." He wittered on in similar paranoid fashion for some minutes. Looking in vain for the gates he had mentioned, my eye was drawn to an old glitterplate on the wall indicating, presumably, the original purpose of the area. It read, *The Spirit Zone Garden of Multifaith Remembrance*, and listed those martyred for their beliefs.

*Richard Dawkins, Humanist Thinker, poisoned by militant Real Darwinists, February 12, 2015.*

"Prepare to fight for our rights to self determination and union with consenting creatures of our own genetic type,"

*Ayatollah Rushdie, beloved of Allah, assassinated by Zionists, March 3, 2025.*

"We may have the bodies of weak and feeble humans, but we have the hearts, stomachs, livers and kidneys of noble beasts,"

*Damien Hirst, RA, Animal Portraitist, stabbed by Hindu vegan extremists September 14, 2032.*

"Whose genes were altered that we might live and love. Victory!" He raised his beaker.

"To the memory of our holy patron and martyr to the cause of Bestial Art," he intoned, indicating my place of concealment. As I shrank behind the tank I saw that it contained not fish but a bisected human corpse floating in murky fluid. It was labelled "The Final Installation."

The Pig drank. The crowd bayed and stamped and drank from bottles and cups – meths laced with zonk, from the smell. Several beastly brothers slumped to the ground, breathing stertorously.

"Now Brothers," he continued. "Let us eat. Bring me the Royal Portion as is my right."

The Royal Portion! My stomach churned as I visualized stewed princeling. In my panic I failed to register the beasties who were approaching their leader with a most unkingly dish of leek. Could I still save the Kid? I dashed from my hiding place.

"Release the Kid or the Pig gets it!" I yelled, aiming the Prince's laser-foil at the fat guy's party hat. As the snarling brutes surrounded me I realized I had no idea how to fire the weapon.

"Well, well," said the Pig. "There is a God after all. Looks like dinner is served."

"Yum, yum!" cried the beasts as they closed in.

Then the sound of a bugle cut through the din and cries of "Youth for Animal Purity. YAP! YAP!" as Georgy Girl's troops stampeded into the Bestiary, pelting the enemy with lumps of antique plastic and hardened leek husk. Smiffy was blowing the bugle so hard I thought his head would explode. I could see Tart's bedraggled feathers bounce as she pushed towards me through the beast-men, the dogs clearing the way with their teeth. I head-butted the nearest sheep-man in the solar plexus and ran for it.

A few moments later and we were dashing across the huge arena, making for the Body Zone but we could hear the mooing and bleating of the angry brutes. Gasping, we reached Kinky's feet. The squeals and cries of "Fi, fi, fo food!" were close behind us.

"Up there!" cried Tart. I looked around wildly - up where? But George pulled a lever on Kinky's big toe. There was a vast creaking and groaning as Kinky's true gender became as flagrant as the Post Office Tower.

"Quick," George said. "They want you for their ritual dinner. We'll hold them off." He pointed to a flimsy ladder ascending Kinky's proud member. I raced upwards, pulling myself to the top and finally sitting comfortably on some kind of sail-cloth shrouding the top of the edifice. Meanwhile my friends below were fighting for their lives and they had run out of ammunition. The Pig's cart trundled into view and I was horrified to see that it was armed with some kind of projectile. From 40 feet up the Pig's bald head looked like a cup-cake in a frilly wrapper. He brought the weapon to bear on the group of helpless whores, terrorists and kids. I saw a guy-rope beside me. There was only one thing to do. I leaped into space. Bales of canvas fell with me.

I aimed for the Pig, missed and tumbled to the ground in a pile of cloth. Dazed, I heard cheers and the triumphant sound of Smiffy's bugle. I looked up. The Pig and his vehicle had been completely smothered by a can-

vas condom which had unravelled as I fell, bearing along its length the message "Safe Sex." The pig and his two cart-pushers crawled from under the wreckage. We had them. Eager hands grabbed them. Tart's little dog yapped at their heels. But with amazing agility the Pig twisted free and reaching forward snatched the dog. It yowled with pain as he squeezed its fat little stomach. I looked around. No one knew what to do. The children looked stunned. Little Curly began to cry. The Pig grinned.

"Now hand over my dinner," he said. I edged towards the kids. Something was nagging in the back of my brain.

"I'll come quietly," I said. "Just let me say goodbye to my friends."

"Be quick," he snarled. I turned my back on him, facing the children, and drew out the laser-foil. I whispered. "For God's sake. One of you must know how to use this."

"You're about to see a dead doggy," the Pig continued.

A hand snatched the laser-foil and whirled towards the Pig. In one smooth movement Tart had fired the deadly beam straight at his transplanted heart. He crashed to the ground.

"I hope you're listening to this, Eve," I said. "Send in the cavalry."

The chubby little corgi ran up to his master.

"Heel, Branson!" said George Arthur Frederick, Prince of Wales.

"I wanted to see what life is like for ordinary people in England so I gave my clothes to one of the women in the Body Zone and took my PIC out. It didn't hurt much. The Pig must have found it and put two and two together. He never got me – I wasn't in any danger. Branson was always there to protect me," said HRH. The corgi rolled over to have its tummy tickled.

I turned to look down at Mandy's. From our vantage point high up on the ice cream cone in Britannia's hand the prison looked quite pretty in the sunlight.

"Maybe you weren't in danger but I sure was," I said. Eve looked frosty but I persisted. "You've still got a lot to learn, Tart."

"Perhaps you would teach me," said the Prince seriously.

"Yeah... sure why not, Tart... Your Highness. Like what am I supposed to call you now?"

"I haven't quite decided yet," said the future king. "But I don't like George. I may decide to use my second name."

**Elizabeth Counihan's** previous stories in *Interzone* were "Remember Me" (issue 68) and "Fairest Isle" (issue 128). She lives in Brighton, and co-edited the recent anthology *Fabulous Brighton*, together with her sister Deirdre, and Liz Williams (for more information see [www.fabulousbrighton.co.uk](http://www.fabulousbrighton.co.uk)). Of the above new story she states: "I would like to thank architect Michael Kohn for advice on the interior of 'Mandy's,' and Richard Robinson for many of the more bizarre ideas."

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### SPECTRUM SF 1, February 2000

Features the first part of an unpublished 'Kiteworld' novel from **Keith Roberts**, 'Drek Yarman.' New novelettes from **Charles Stross** and **Alastair Reynolds** ('Great Wall of Mars,' a long addition to his Coalition-Conjoiner series). Short stories from **Eric Brown** & **Keith Brooke** ('Mind's Eye,' their best collaboration yet) and **Garry Kilworth**.

### SPECTRUM SF 2, April 2000

A new novella from **Eric Brown** ('Destiny on Tartarus,' the first story in his 'Fall of Tartarus' sequence but complete on its own). Short stories from **Jack Deighton**, **Stephen Baxter** & **Eric Brown**, **Keith Brooke**, **Stephen Palmer** (a 'Spired Inn' tale) and **Barrington J. Bayley**. Part two of **Keith Roberts'** novel.

### SPECTRUM SF 3, July 2000

This issue contains the stunning conclusion to **Keith Roberts'** novel 'Drek Yarman,' and long novelettes from **Eric Brown** and **Charles Stross** (the chilling 'A Colder War' – no pun intended!) plus a short story from **Jack Deighton**.

Each issue also has an editorial, competitions and a review column called The Archive. We hope to add a letters column from issue #3.

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# Stapledon *with* Sarcasm

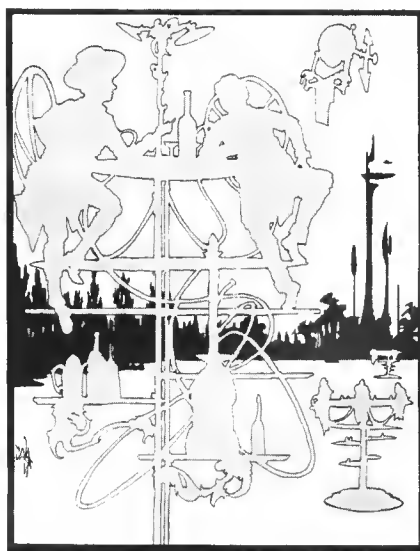
**Brian Stableford**  
*interviewed by Nick Gevers*

Brian Stableford, born in 1948, is probably the most persuasive and most eloquent of contemporary British sf writers. Since early in his career he has produced a stream of ingenious and subversive novels, which, whether space-operatic entertainments or extravagantly experimental meta-physical romances, have argued the case for transformation: radical transformation of the physical body through the miracles of speculative biology, and intellectual transformation through visionary contemplation and cogent polemical discussion. His books typify the Scientific Romance form his criticism has done so much to define: dark, cool, curious and discursive, they dramatize and question the nature and application of knowledge, exploring the long evolutionary perspectives bequeathed to British sf by Olaf Stapledon in a spirit of sarcastically provocative inquiry.

Stableford's early works, such as the "Dies Irae" trilogy (1971), were inventive but relatively lightweight; his distinctive brand of relentless biological speculation began to achieve full expression in the space operas of the "Hooded Swan" sequence (six volumes, 1972-75) and the "Daedalus Mission" series (six volumes, 1976-79). The most impressive and experimental works of the first phase of his career were the major novels *Man in a Cage* (1975), *The Mind-Riders* (1976), *The Realms of Tartarus* (1977) and *The Walking Shadow* (1979).

After some years in which he

worked chiefly as an academic and critic, Stableford returned to sf with tremendous vigour in 1988, with a revisionist vampire novel, *The Empire of Fear*. Its formidable rhetoric and atmospheric intensity carried over in full measure to Stableford's masterpiece, the secret-historical trilogy made up of *The Werewolves of London* (1990), *The Angel of Pain* (1991) and *The Carnival of Destruction* (1994), as well as to the excellent stories in *Sexual Chemistry* (1991), the contemporary horror novel *Young Blood* (1992) and the superb Dracula-meets-H. G. Wells novella *The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires* (1996). More in the vein of his early sequences, the trilogy "The



Books of Genesys" (1995-97) details the biological splendours and mysteries of a far-off world, superficially in the manner of fantasy.

Stableford's current project is a large and complex future history, which he began to delineate in short stories in the mid-1980s, but which he is only now developing in full. The volumes thus far published are *Inherit the Earth* (1998), *Architects of Emortality* (1999) and *The Fountains of Youth* (2000).

I interviewed Brian Stableford by e-mail in March 2000.

NG: Since an early age, you've been producing eloquent, colourful and visionary sf. How were you first attracted to the genre, and what persuaded you to become an sf writer?

BS: I read a great deal of sf in my early teens and it seemed only natural to try to write some. I was irredeemably corrupted when I sold a story written in collaboration with a school friend to *Science-Fantasy*. Once I knew that there was money to be made there was no stopping me.

NG: You have a degree in biology, and your interest in speculative biology and biotechnology is apparent in a good deal of your work. How would you sum up your basic conception of the genetic future of humankind? And how have you embodied this in your fiction?

BS: It became obvious as soon as the genetic code was cracked in the 1960s that the era of evolution by natural selection was over, and that future changes in what is incorrectly termed "human nature" would be the product of genetic engineering. The yukk factor has determined that most fiction dealing with that prospect has been horror fiction, but I've always tried to redress the balance by treating the possibilities – especially the prospect of emortality – enthusiastically.

NG: Emortality is a term you frequently employ in your sf; how is it distinct from immortality?

BS: I borrowed the word "emortality" from R. C. W. Ettinger, who uses it to refer to a human condition which is not subject to aging or disease, and therefore might continue indefinitely although it could be ended at any moment by extreme violence. "Immortality" can then be reserved to supernatural beings who cannot die even if, like the Wandering Jew of legend, they cast themselves into the mouth of a volcano.

NG: You have a Ph.D. in Sociology,



which was your teaching subject for some time. Has this discipline also made an important contribution to your sf?

BS: I've taught courses in the philosophy of social science, the sociology of technology and the sociology of literature and the mass media, all of which have impacted on my fiction to some extent. The most obvious influence of my endeavours in the first-named field has been a couple of stories about the "Oedipus effect" – the effect that the issuing of a prediction has on the likelihood of its fulfilment. The legacy of the second field is evident in the philosophy underlying my biotechnology stories, sometimes made explicit when characters have occasion to refer back to the role played by early biotechnologies in creating "human nature." The influence of my work in the sociology of literature is even more fundamental, though rarely explicit – it has always put a subtly perverse pressure on my decisions as to what to write and how.

NG: Another salient influence on your writing is your extremely thorough knowledge of the British Scientific Romances of the 19th and early 20th centuries, concerning which you've produced important scholarly work. How have you managed to assimilate such a huge body of often obscure literature so completely?

BS: I read a lot. I've always been interested in the historical development of imaginative fiction and I've always been an assiduous hunter of second-hand bookshops. As soon as I got hold of a copy of Everett Bleiler's *Checklist of Fantastic Literature* in 1970 or thereabouts I embarked on a relentless quest to track down and read everything listed therein, and everything that should have been but wasn't.

NG: Drawing on your understanding of the Scientific Romance form, you've done a lot to define the basic differences between British Scientific Romance and American sf. How, briefly, would you sum up those differences? And how important to sf as a whole is the existence of a separate British ethic or tradition?

BS: Scientific romance first developed while middlebrow magazines like *The Strand* were in their experimental phase. When it failed to attract enough interest to hold a significant place there it clung on to a fugitive existence in books until the 1930s, when it was revived by alarmist anxieties about the possibility of a second world war. Apart from its extensions

in juvenile "boys' books" scientific romance was almost exclusively earth-bound and deeply cynical about the limitations of contemporary mankind. Science fiction, on the other hand, developed in [mainly American] low-brow pulp magazines that were dominated by action-adventure formats – space opera became the most extravagant form of pulp adventure fiction, providing an umbrella under which less colourful and more ambitious *contes philosophiques* could be sheltered.

After World War II, when scientific romance *per se* was wiped out by the deluge of sf that was part and parcel of cultural "coca-colonization," sf gradually became more akin to scientific romance – a process that would have been completed much sooner if the space programme hadn't allowed some American writers to maintain the illusion that there was an atom of plausibility lurking somewhere at the heart of space opera. British traditions of every kind have, of course, been utterly exterminated by cultural globalization, so they are no longer of any



importance to anything.

NG: The subject matter, style and sensibility of the British scientific romance pervade your work. But your numerous early novels of the 1970s, like those forming the "Dies Irae," "Hooded Swan" and "Daedalus Mission" sequences, were first published in the USA by publishers like DAW. Why did you find the U.S. paperback market so congenial at that time? How difficult was it to adapt to its demands and conditions?

BS: During the first phase of my career the late Donald A. Wollheim – initially at Ace, then at DAW – was the only editor who showed any con-

sistent sympathy for my work, so most of it was aimed at him; the projects that weren't mostly fell by the wayside. Had Don not set up DAW in 1972 I would have had no alternative but to concentrate on my academic career, and would never have had the luxury of switching from biology to sociology. I might even have become a useful member of society. I was lucky that I started writing at a time when the marketplace was expanding rapidly and there was plenty of space at the bottom. Don had an entire "stable" of British writers upon whom he relied to provide a steady flow of journeyman work – Ted Tubb, Ken Bulmer, John Brunner, John Rackham/John T. Phillifent and Barry Bayley were the other members; without him, none of us would have had a career (and we might all have been forced to become useful members of society!).

NG: As a 1970s writer, you undertook some relatively experimental projects, like *Man in a Cage*, *The Mind-Riders* and the very impressive *The Walking Shadow*. Were you inspired at all by the ideals of the New Wave (either British or American)?

BS: Those were three of the books that I wrote in the hope of moving a little way upmarket during the first phase of my career, but none was commercially successful – *Man in a Cage* never went into paperback and never appeared in the UK, *The Walking Shadow* didn't find a US buyer at the time, and *The Mind-Riders* ended up at DAW. I didn't really think of them as "New Wave" although I was interested in and sympathetic to the New Wave phenomenon.

NG: Moving forward to your quite majestic exercises in the scientific romance vein in the last twelve years: first to appear was *The Empire of Fear*, an intense mingling of vampire fiction and alternate history, driven by an absolute and quite didactic commitment to the principle of scientific truth at any cost. What motivated your swing to the hybridization of sf, horror and the historical novel in this and subsequent books like the *Werewolves of London* trilogy? What effect is the interplay of genres meant to achieve?

BS: I didn't write any fiction at all between the spring of 1981 and the beginning of 1986, after I got tenure in my lecturing post at Reading University. I went back to it, initially, as a matter of amusement, producing a considerable number of short stories. When the [Nigel] Lawson boom reached its feverish height in 1987, however, British publishers were

actively shopping around for sf so I began to submit outlines for novels. The one that I was most keen to do was an element in my future biotechnology series called *Le Fleurs Du Mal*, but that was too eccentric to sell even in a boom (I eventually cut it back to a novella, which sold to Asimov's in the mid-90s, paving the way for its re-expansion and eventual publication in 1999 as *Architects of Emortality*).

I submitted *Le Fleurs* to Simon & Schuster along with a short story called "The Man Who Loved the Vampire Lady," which I'd sold to *F&SF* in 1986 (although it didn't appear until 1988), proposing that the story might be extrapolated into an episodic novel [*The Empire of Fear*]. Anne Rice was just becoming popular and the S&S editor seized upon it as a promotable property. When S&S sold on the paperback rights for a much larger sum than the advance they'd paid me (thus making a considerable profit before publication) the editor became extremely enthusiastic to commission a follow-up, to the extent that she persuaded me to expand the [*Werewolves*] outline I submitted from one volume to three.

The basic premise of "The Man Who Loved the Vampire Lady" – and hence of *The Empire of Fear* – was that if vampires really could exist, they wouldn't be solitary fugitives forever in flight from Van Helsingesque persecutors, but would instead have established themselves as a powerful aristocracy – a position that might come under threat when the development of the scientific method led "common men" to speculate as to whether the vampire condition might be natural rather than supernatural, and hence available to anyone who could master the trick. When I was asked for a follow-up it seemed only natural to wonder whether [in the *Werewolves* trilogy] I could set up a metaphysical framework in which *all* the supernatural beings imagined by religion, myth and folklore could not only be real but would have perfectly good reasons for behaving in the elusively mysterious ways that have always been their forte.

NG: *The Empire of Fear* is a very dramatic book, written at a powerfully formal rhetorical pitch, and the same applies to the *Werewolves* books. Large store is placed on persuasive argument, oratory really. The effect of this is intellectually exhilarating, in a manner fully faithful to the scientific romance form. But is this also your natural authorial mode?

BS: I'm interested in several different fields of science, philosophy, literature and history – and, of course, in the

links between them that tend to fall between the cracks of the traditional academic disciplines. Fiction – especially dialogue – is a useful medium for exploring ideas, and I've always been fascinated by the varied ways in which sf and fantasy have served in that capacity during the last 200 years. All of which, not unnaturally, inclines me to be far more didactic in my fiction than the vast majority of editors and readers can tolerate. I am, however, quite unrepentant about my tendency to indulge in rhapsodic visionary interludes, strident rhetoric and intensely inquisitive dialogue; I still regret the 20,000 words that were cut from *The Empire of Fear* and the 15,000 shed by the copy-editor commissioned to butcher *The Werewolves of London*.

NG: The *Werewolves* trilogy is a sort of fantasticated account of the history of scientific inquiry, set mainly in the Victorian period. Much of the action takes the form of dreams, visions, hallucinations, encounters with godlike beings who shouldn't really be there. Would it be fair to call this technique a form of surrealism? And why do you now so frequently employ this opium-dream atmosphere, another example being your contemporary sf/horror novel *Young Blood*?

BS: If "surrealism" consists of a calculated blurring of the boundary between subjective and objective experience then much of my recent work is certainly surreal – although some might think that it is far too calculated in its examination of the boundaries and the blurring thereof. The *Werewolves* trilogy and *Young Blood* both try, in slightly different ways, to provide an explanation of the blurring, and it could be argued that any such attempt at explanation is a betrayal of the surrealist philosophy. *Year Zero* (see below) might be reckoned more honestly surreal, in that the entire emphasis is placed on the bizarre experiences of the heroine and the question of the extent to which they are hallucinatory is deliberately confused.

Whenever I deal with supposedly "supernatural" events I'm far more interested in their subjective significance than their possible objectivity (I am, of course, a confirmed Sadducee as well as a committed atheist, utterly rejecting the reality of all "spiritual beings") so all my "ghost stories" and "fantasies" might be reckoned to be exercises in surrealism.

NG: Considering the Victorian fever-dream atmosphere of the *Werewolves* trilogy and similar works, and the anthologies you've edited on the

theme of decadence, it's clear that decadence is a central theme of your writing. Can you enlarge on this pre-occupation?

BS: I've always been a great admirer of 19th-century French fantasy, because of its luxuriant stylization and its sharp moral scepticism. The most effusive fiction of that kind was produced as the illusions of Romanticism decayed and faded, and it was provided with a manifesto of sorts by Gautier's introduction to the third (posthumous) edition of Baudelaire's *Le Fleurs du Mal*. Gautier suggested that such literary effusions are symptomatic of any civilization in decay and that Baudelaire's work was testimony to the fact that contemporary France had reached a historical phase comparable to the Roman Empire in decline. I've tried to extend the analogy somewhat, taking it for granted that the empire of mortality (aka the empire of fear) really is in terminal decline and that its fall cannot long be delayed; modern fantasy ought, therefore, to be far more decadent (stylistically speaking) than it is; mercifully, science fiction is beginning to make great strides in its imagery of the far future.

NG: Your Victorian/Steampunk emphasis has continued with your novellas for *Interzone*, starting with "The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires"; these follow the pattern of a gathering of eminent period figures, who listen to a visionary narrative from one of their number before discussing it in great philosophical depth. I find these stories compulsively interesting. A longer version of the first novella was published as a novel by Mark Ziesing; is there any prospect of seeing fuller versions of "The Black Blood of the Dead" and "The Gateway of Eternity" in print soon?

BS: When I prepared the abridged version of "The Gateway of Eternity" for *Interzone* I submitted it under the title "Pandora's Box" to distinguish it from the portmanteau novel I made up simultaneously out of the longer versions of all three novellas, but David Pringle preferred the title I'd given to the entire work. No publisher could be found for the portmanteau novel, and there seems to be no possibility of Mark Ziesing issuing the second and third parts separately, so they're unlikely to get into print any time soon, but if Sarob Press can make a profit on *Year Zero* [out this year] I'm hopeful that they might take on some of my other unpublished works, and might even, in the fullness of time, be brave enough to tackle something as

massive and as esoteric as the 170,000-word *Gateway of Eternity*.

NG: Another recent work is the "Genesys" trilogy, a large planetary romance with a strong emphasis on your old interest, biology. Is this extravagant sequence in some sense a homage to the inventive exoticism of writers such as Jack Vance?

BS: I prepared the prospectus for "Genesys" at a time when the bottom had fallen out of the sf market and nothing seemed to be selling except three-volume quest fantasies. I designed it as something that would not only look like a three-volume quest fantasy but would contain almost all the standard stereotypes of that kind of fiction, although – as in *The Empire of Fear* and the *Werewolves* trilogy – I wanted to provide an underlying explanatory logic for them. I was, of course, well aware of Jack Vance's exercises in a similar vein and there are certainly echoes of novels like *Big Planet* in "Genesys," although the story ends up in a very different place because I was determined to avoid the kind of easy climactic fix prescribed by the literary formula.

NG: Your current series is a six-volume future history drawing on some of the material first prominently broached in your futurological collaboration with David Langford, *The Third Millennium* (1988), and being published in the US by Tor. The first two books, *Inherit the Earth* and *Architects of Emortality*, involve a curious but highly successful combination of the conventions of the mean-streets thriller/police procedural with visionary evolutionary perspectives reminiscent of Olaf Stapledon's. Why did you choose to implement this alliance of genres? And what direction will this series ultimately take?

BS: The projected series is, in essence, Utopian, and has to grapple with the fundamental problem of all utopian fiction. The essence of dramatic tension is that things are going horribly wrong and that the world needs to be saved, so worlds-within-texts in which everything is going rather well tend to be a trifle dull. The standard thriller formula requires villains – straw men set up to be knocked down by the righteous – and it's difficult to adapt that formula to a world in which everybody is fundamentally decent and reasonable. I've tried to overcome these problems by writing my utopian romances as exotic sarcastic comedies (not satires, except insofar as anti-biotechnological stances are satirized).

Those which have a thriller element – including *The Cassandra Complex*, which is the first of the series, chronologically speaking, although it will be the fourth published – are all fakes, although the fakery is only blatant in *Architects of Emortality* (which, as I've noted above, was outlined and partly-written way back in 1987).

My original idea was to use the four mock-thriller episodes (*Dark Ararat* will be the next one written if Tor agree to continue with the project) to establish an audience-base that would make the last two [more visionary] volumes marketable, although the fact that they've been published out of sequence means that *The Fountains of Youth* – an expansion of "Mortimer Gray's History of Death," whose original version also dates back to 1987 – will appear in May 2000,



ahead of *Dark Ararat* as well as *Fountain's* direct sequel, *The Omega Expedition*. If Tor keeps the series going long enough to incorporate *The Omega Expedition* that novel will "bracket" the whole series, expanding and extrapolating "... And He Not Busy Being Born," the short story that kicked off the entire enterprise way back in 1986; Mortimer Gray will also be a major character, as will Madoc Tamlin (from *Inherit the Earth*), thus providing a panoramic set of perspectives.

NG: A feature of your career seems to be an uneasy relationship with your publishing markets: some of your books appear in the UK but not in the USA, and vice versa, and your publishers have at times engaged in odd stunts, such as (in the UK) bringing out the first two *Werewolves* novels as well-advertised hardcovers and the third as an obscure paperback. What lies behind this? Is it simply your natural versatility, the difficulty of making you fit into convenient market niches?

BS: I've always found it very difficult to sell my work – not surprisingly, given its inherent perversity. A keen

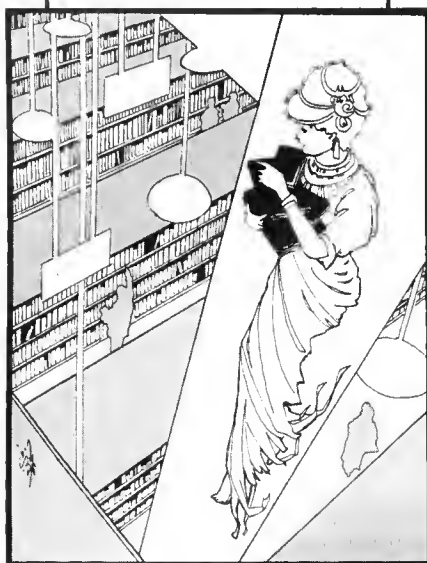
interest in subverting stereotypes and a relentless insistence on following my own idiosyncratic agendas are not qualities that endear a writer to the average editor, so I've been extremely lucky to find as many opportunities for commercial publication as I have. I dare say that I shall be soon relegated to the rapidly-swelling ranks of ex-professional writers (having already attained that status in the UK) but I am fortunate in being too old to obtain gainful employment, so I shall have no alternative but to continue writing ever-more-esoteric works, hoping to find publishers among the small presses, until I starve to death. What more glorious way is there to die?

NG: Despite this pessimism, have you any further projects in mind? You have a new collection coming from the publisher Sarob Press in Wales; can you say something about that?

BS: *Year Zero*, due from Sarob this summer, is an episodic novel. It was originally designed as a series of short stories continuing the adventures of the central character of an *Interzone* story called "When Molly Met Elvis," which appeared under my Francis Amery pseudonym. After using her again in "Molly and the Angel," I conceived the notion of extrapolating a series to describe her increasingly bizarre exploits as the year 2000 proceeds to an apocalyptic conclusion, involving her with all sorts of contemporary icons after the fashion of the alien abduction story "Molly and the Men in Black."

The later stories, not published in *Interzone*, are "Molly and the Neighbours from Hell," "Molly's Lost Week-ends," the novelette-length "Molly – Warrior Princess" and "Molly and the Mad Scientists," and the novella "Molly and the Apocalypse of Evil." Readers of the first three stories interested in knowing how Molly's quest to recover her children and thwart the Men in Black (not to mention the Devil) eventually works out will have to fight over the 270 publicly-available copies of the Sarob Press edition. *Year Zero* is by far the funniest and most reader-friendly thing I have ever written, but no commercial publisher would touch it. Such is life.

**Note:** Brian Stableford's *Year Zero*, incorporating the three "Molly" stories from *Interzone* plus the others described above, is published by Sarob Press ("Brynderwen," 41 Forest View, Mountain Ash, Wales CF45 3DU; e-mail: sarobpress@hotmail.com).



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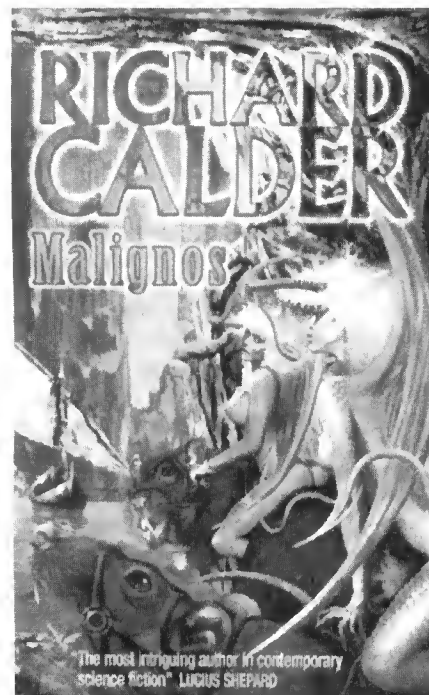
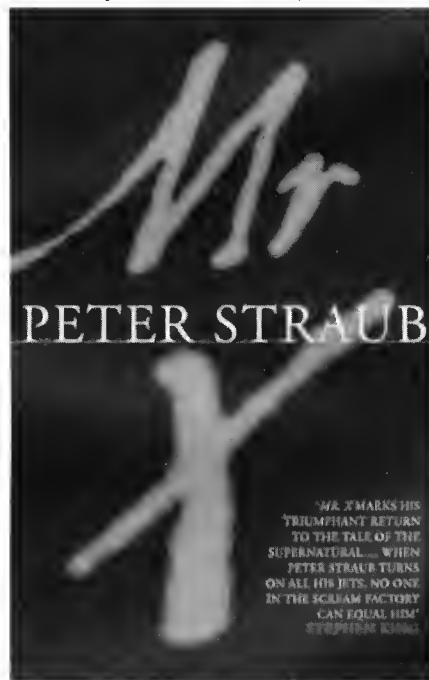
## Back to the Genre

Paul J. McAuley

Even as the horror genre's giddily brief boom flowered and faded, Peter Straub, one of its most distinguished and literate authors, was moving into the mainstream with novels that were increasingly more mystery than fantasy. Another century, another leaf, turn, turn, turn. Not only is *Mr X* (HarperCollins, £10.99) Straub's first full-blooded supernatural horror novel since *Floating Dragon* (1982) and his soon-to-be-sequelized collaboration with Stephen King, *Talisman* (1984), but one strand of its complex and intricately enigmatic narrative draws lovingly upon the Lovecraftian Cthulhu mythos, that unquiet heart of American horror fiction.

The story is superficially simple. Ned Dunstan, who at every birthday is seized by horrific visions of the bloody deeds of a man he calls Mr X, has a premonition of his mother's death just before his 35th birthday. He hurries back to Egerton, the town where he was brought up, finds his mother dying of a stroke, and comes into his inheritance after discovering the secret of his birth and the identity of his true father, who we quickly learn is indeed Mr X, a psychopath whose plan to kill his son springs from his belief that Lovecraft was writing not fiction but the truth about the nature of the Universe. But within this basic story are briar patches and mazes, coils and traps, evasions and allusions (chief of which, never overtly stated, but crucial to a story set in a town on the banks of the Mississippi, being that Ned Dunstan is black), and a strong supernatural streak. For Ned Dunstan has a *doppelgänger*, a twin who is not quite human, and his family, all possessed of supernatural powers some degree, may be not quite human either.

Straub cunningly and magisterially combines the conventions of the supernatural and the detective story in a novel which slowly uncovers the history of the Dunstons, and the mystery which links them with the town's premier family. Despite the understated appearance of telepathy, time travel, teleportation, and telekinesis, the story is strongly anchored by Straub's detailed evocation of a small town riddled with secrets and unspoken common truths, and centred upon winding, mysteriously interconnected alleys where the past appears never to have quite faded. With as large a cast of finely drawn eccentrics as you're liable to find outside of *Twin Peaks*, told in a deceptively straightforward style by its believably resourceful hero, *Mr X* is



wonderfully devious yet scrupulously honest, and will amply repay your close attention. Highly recommended.

Richard Calder may have written his way out of the genuinely exotic post-cyberpunk sf which made his name, but his voice remains as distinctive as ever: wryly mordant, darkly lyrical, and laced with an authentic *fin de siècle* decadence. His latest novel, *Malignos* (Earthlight, £6.99), opens with an arresting scene on a Philippine beach in which the hero, Richard Pike, is fighting a duel with a Tasmanian bore who has besmirched his outcast love (the plight of illicit lovers is a consistent theme in Calder's fiction), a duel which Pike wins by default when devils erupt through the sand and drag the Tasmanian underground. For *Malignos*, a very distant and self-contained sequel to Calder's *Frenzetta*, is set far in the future, long after particles from a parallel universe flooded our own, infected certain human beings, and changed them, body and soul, into devilish *malignos*. Pike's love, Gala, is a renegade *malignos*, an exotic dancer and whore equipped with scales, tail and bat wings. Pike is a veteran of wars between men and *malignos* deep under London, but his love for Gala has made him as much an outcast as she. Although ostensibly a mercenary, he's content to live off Gala's earnings while fooling himself that he's an artist, but then they're betrayed, Gala succumbs to a sleeping sickness induced by poison, and Pike must prove his worth by searching the crepuscular zones of a hollowed Earth for the antidote.

Pike is the caustically unreliable narrator of his own picaresque adventures. His journey through the circles of the netherworld of the *malignos*



towards the city of Pandemonium (the capital of Hell in Milton's *Paradise Lost*), accompanied by the very same Tasmanian who was once his enemy, enduring frighteningly unsuitable trysts, armies of feral children, the attentions of lusty twin necromancers, and much else, is as much a quest for self-knowledge as it is for the McGuffin of the antidote. Endlessly inventive, bitingly comic and affectingly tragic, its ultimate revelation turning upon a genuine evocation of sense of wonder, this story of a Dying Earth and the quest of a melancholy champion is remade by Calder into something genuinely strange and original.

ingly harsh Martian surface, and try to persuade their sponsor and the Airbus expedition to freight the necessary spare parts to Mars.

The politicking, fund-raising and commercialization (on-the-surface ads for Mars Bars, the Valles Marineris renamed after Bill Gates), although never developed into the broad satire of, say, Terry Bisson's *Voyage to the Red Planet*, are nicely contrasted with the astronaut's frustration over the resulting scientific compromises, particularly the lack of time to properly study the strange bacterial life discovered deep underground, and the scientific scandal of the Airbus expedition's plan to win the race. *The Martian Race's* brisk yet intricately plotted trajectory might be aimed squarely at the mainstream market, but Benford never sacrifices scientific plausibility to the unfolding plot, and smoothly steers the story from a detailed extolation of capitalism's can-do virility to a glad rush of free-flying speculation – for Martian life is stranger than it first appears – in the best traditions of core sf.

**S***ky Coyote* (Avon, \$5.99), Kage Baker's second novel, shares the same setup as her first, *In the Garden of Iden*. A 24th-century company, Dr Zeus, has developed a method of travelling into the past, and sidesteps the usual problem of being unable to change recorded history by manipulating and looting the vast stretches of *unrecorded* history (what happens if this changes the history we do know about isn't explored, but *Sky Coyote* isn't that kind of sf). Dr Zeus's operations are facilitated by agents recruited from Neanderthals and Cro-Magons in the deep past who, rendered into immortal six-million-dollar cyborgs and saturated

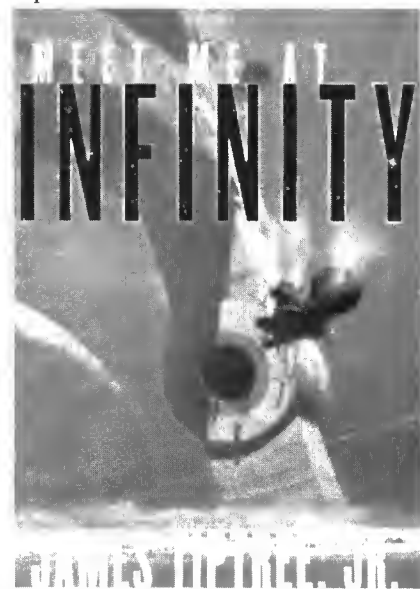
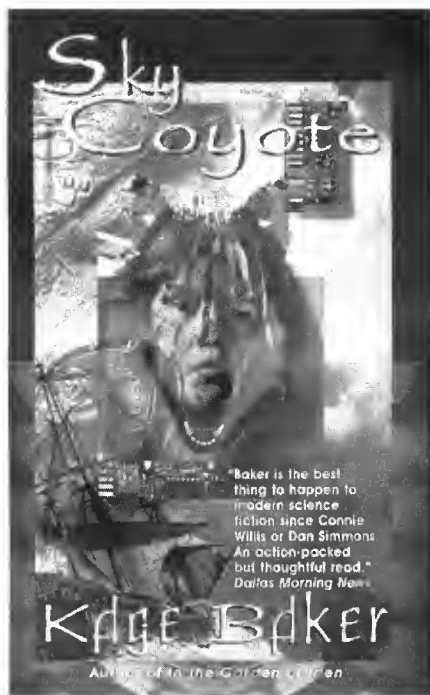
with knowledge of every period of human history, are travelling into the future at the rate of one year per year.

The story is narrated by one of these agents, Facilitator Joseph, who, masquerading as the eponymous trickster god, must persuade a tribe of Indians from 17th-century California to leave for the future before the Spanish arrive and wipe them out. And that – garnished by an earthquake and a problem with a religious bigot, and lengthy descriptions of theatrical set-pieces – is about it. Still, cheerfully stuffed full of satires on political correctness and cultural relativism, parodies, slapstick, and jokes both good and bad (mostly derived from Joseph's anachronistic 20th-century attitude, which is nicely explained at the very end), *Sky Coyote* doesn't take itself seriously, and neither should we. Despite the skimpy story and a plethora of loose plot-ends (Joseph's prickly relationship with his protégé, who disappears off stage for most of the book, the mystery of what happens after 2355, where the agents' knowledge of history ends) which may or may not be resolved in further books, *Sky Coyote*, slight but spirited, is impossible to dislike.



**G**regory Benford's *The Martian Race* (Orbit, £6.99) is a fast-paced and clean-limbed thriller which has some fresh new things to say about that well-worn theme, the first expedition to Mars. Its premise, based on a serious proposal by Robert Zubrin, is simple. After the first manned NASA expedition blows up on the launch pad, the race to Mars is thrown open to free enterprise. Anyone who can get to Mars, perform a statutory amount of exploration and experimentation, and bring back enough geological specimens, will win the Mars Prize of 30 billion dollars.

The first expedition to land on Mars, funded by a Consortium led by the publicity-hungry billionaire John Axelrod, may not win the prize, for a swifter, nuclear-powered ship designed by the European-Chinese Airbus Group could beat them back to Earth even though it is scheduled to arrive on Mars after the Consortium's departure. Then the Consortium's return vehicle fails, and the four astronauts must struggle to survive an extended stay on the unrelent-



**M***eeet Me at Infinity* (Tor, \$25.95) collects eight previously unpublished stories and a slew of journalism, reviews, interviews and commentary by James Tiptree, Jr, the pseudonym, and for a long time the best kept secret, of the late Alice Sheldon. Tiptree was the freshest and perhaps the most important short story writer on the sf scene in the 1970s and 1980s (the revelation that Tiptree was a woman was genuine a you-had-to-be-there shock), driven by a fierce love of the world and its peoples, and an equally fierce hatred of the cupidity and stupidity which threatened what she loved. Passionate and



clear-eyed, when her husband became gravely ill, she killed him, and then herself.

"It came to me," Sheldon says in her first interview (still in her disguise as Tiptree), "all I write is one story. There's this backward little type, and he's doing some gray little task and believing like they tell him, and one day he starts to vomit and rushes straight up a mountain, usually to his doom." That self-knowing parody (specifically of "And I Have Come Upon This Place by Lost Ways") hides like all the best parodies an uncomfortable grain of

Everyone has his favourite Heinlein novel, but I'd be surprised if anyone failed to rank *Double Star* pretty high. It's the story of an unassuming guy who finds a dangerous greatness thrust upon him, and how he meets the challenge: a plotline which tempts the writer to be fey, inconsistent or preachy. Heinlein avoided the first two, and succumbed to the third (his worst failing) only occasionally; in *Hunted* (Eos, \$6.99) James Alan Gardner avoids both the latter, and is not unconscionably fey. By a pleasing coincidence, like *Double Star*, *Hunted* has to do with the difficulties of establishing and maintaining good relations with aliens, principally the Mandasar, who are hive-creatures with pre-determined castes.

Such aliens have had a bad press, the general presumption (typified by Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*) being that they must be quasi-Marxist imperialists without whom the Universe would be cleaner. When they look like us (as in Sprague de Camp's *Rogue Queen*) they're victims in need of reprogramming; and when they are us (Frank Herbert's *Hellstrom's Hive*) they're practitioners of a vile perversion. This lot look like lobsters, but Edward York, the first-person protagonist, likes and understands them, and they return his affection in some unusual ways.

York is one of those unfortunate people who get given the best of everything (including genetic modification) by pushy parents (or in his case, one pushy parent – a fascist space admiral), and are then expected to evince genius from the cradle. When he fails to do so, all parties assume he'll fail at everything, and make no secret of their disappointment. He has therefore grown to middle age in a deepening spiral of self-contempt, made worse by his continued survival when other, apparently much worthier types, have died by violence or misfortune. The opening, which finds him the single survivor on a starship whose entire complement has been simultaneously struck dead, seems merely an extreme example of his sort of luck, but of course, he's about to Learn Better.

veracity: her stories were about truth, the cost of hiding truth, and the price of receiving a revelation and acting on it.

The stories collected here are mostly squibs, but there is a nice spoof of *Star Trek* (which Sheldon loved) in "Happiness is a Warm Spaceship," and the very fine late novella, "The Color of Neanderthal Eyes." More compelling is the non-fiction, gracefully edited by Jeffrey D. Smith, the curator of her literary estate, who, as editor of the fanzine *Phantasmicon*, began a correspondence with Sheldon-as-Tiptree that developed into a friendship which lasted the rest

of her life. From Sheldon's first story (a lightly fictionalized account of her experience in Germany just after the end of the Second World War, published in *The New Yorker*), to vivid travel pieces and personal essays about herself and her writing, all are informed by an intense passion and tremendous wit and intelligence. If you have not read any of Tiptree's work, try and find a copy of *10,000 Light Years From Home*, *Warm Worlds and Otherwise*, or *Star Songs of an Old Primate*. Then I won't have to tell you to read this.

Paul J. McAuley

## Mayhem – with Gentle Comedy

Chris Gilmore

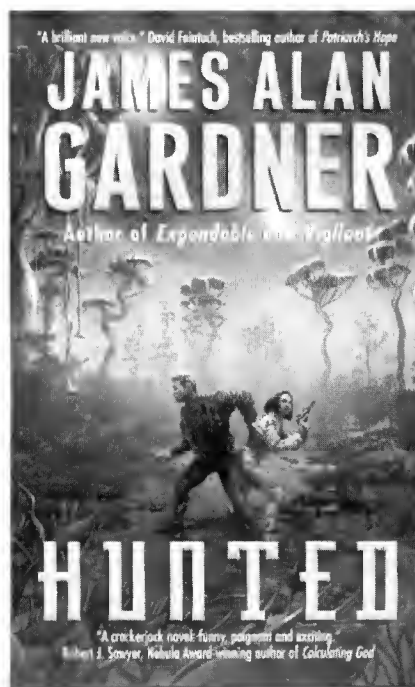
The story that follows is one of intrigue, double-dealing and shocking disclosures, as York discovers and surmounts the ever-murkier secrets of his own family and being. As such it's highly conventional, and must stand or fall by the quality of the construction and writing. These are both excellent throughout. Despite its complexity, by the end of the book there's not a loose

end unaccounted for; and a lot of aspects which I took for ornamentation (good ornamentation, but "a bit mere," even so) turned out to be vital to some later development.

The writing is equally distinguished, and in an even more unusual fashion. The comedy-thriller, sf or otherwise, is a recognized sub-genre and often well done; but it's almost always broad, not to say brutal, comedy. By contrast, though Gardner's emotional range is wide, he represents compassion especially well. His description of how an isolated community of Mandasar, separated from their home culture as infants, attempts to sustain its traditions is enthralling, and very moving. He offers *gentle* comedy among all the mayhem, and his jokes work because they're based on precise visualization.

Altogether, I have only one real complaint against this book. It hinges on the presumption that the galaxy is dominated by a "League of Peoples" who enforce just one basic law on such lesser breeds as ourselves. Any murderer, or anyone who attempts to cross interstellar space with murderous intent, is automatically killed the moment they try. Any lesser delinquency is pardonable, but not that. Sounds OK, but... suppose North America and Arabia were in different systems? Then Desert Storm could not have happened, so Kuwait, and by now Saudi Arabia, the UAE etc., would lie under the brutal heel of Saddam Hussein – a prospect from which only Sir Edward Heath could derive satisfaction. I had to strain rather to swallow this aspect, and for others that may not be possible. All honour to them, but I found it worth the effort.

Following my review of his *Explorers* last month, I'm very pleased to see Gardner Dozois's *The Furthest Horizon*, also from St Martin's at \$17.95, and devoted to tales of the far future. As before, I have just two gripes, about an inclusion, and about an exclusion: now that the expanded version has been published in book form, I see no real virtue in reprinting the novella version of Poul Anderson's "Genesis"; and I regret that Dozois's self-imposed



restriction on anything pre-1950 has prevented him from including John W. Campbell Jr's "Twilight" and "Night," which he mentions in his Preface. That said, nothing in this anthology is undistinguished, though inevitably I have my favourites.

In the Preface, Dozois refers to "oceanic time," a sense that a world whose recorded history extends over (at least) hundreds of thousands of years will have a texture quite different from ours, with its scant and patchy six millennia. With the best will in the world, I couldn't find it in all the stories, though Aldiss manages it superbly in "Old Hundredth" as does Gene Wolfe in "The Map" (a pendant to the *New Sun* books). Other writers are intent on other things. Avram Davidson's "Bumberboom" is a very affectionate parody of the linguistic games Jack Vance likes to play; Fred Pohl's "Day Million" isn't really a story at all, but a speculative article with a concrete illustration; Cordwainer Smith's "Alpha Alpha Boulevard" is a complicated literary joke to which the key is now lost. Presumably Smith could have given a reason why an oracular computer of the far future should wish to rerun in human flesh *Paul et Virginie*, a sentimental novel of 1798, but we can only shrug and ask, "Why not?"

Most writers consider fearfully the awesome power which our descendants (physical or intellectual) will be able to deploy, and wonder how wisely they will do so. This shows up most strongly in Robert Reed's "Sister Alice," Paul J. McAuley's beautifully written "Recording Angel," Walter Jon Williams's savage "Dinosaurs," and "Pale Roses," which shows just how well Michael Moorcock can write when he can be bothered – even though the responsibility proves to be as illusory as everything else in the world of Werther de Goethe.

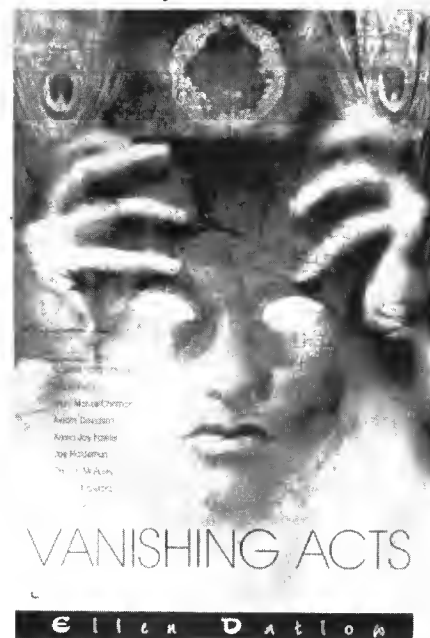
To what extent that story can be classed as sf is problematic; when you approach the very far future, the boundary with fantasy blurs. I would place Jack Vance's "Guyal of Sferre" firmly in the fantasy camp, but as it's my favourite of all the *Dying Earth* stories, I'm not complaining. The status of the final story, Ian McDonald's "The Days of Solomon Gursky," is yet problematicker. It attempts, through imagery of unparalleled scale and lushness, to express what Frank Tipler's Omega Point would be like, and how the principal participant would manipulate it. His conclusion, that it will come right in the end through a combination of traditional Jewish eroticism, compassion and sense of obligation strikes me as highly unlikely – but then, I'm a pessimist.

Ellen Datlow's new anthology, *Vanishing Acts* (Tor, \$24.95) is also themed, to the idea of endangered species – which may include mankind.



Predictably, it's of less consistent quality than Dozois's; it contains only four reprints to set against twelve commissioned works, of which several read rather mechanically. It's also a somewhat gloomy collection, if only because the failures outnumber the successes, and the general conclusion seems to be that of all endangered species, the least worth saving is our own. Avram Davidson's "Now Let Us Sleep" presents a view of ourselves that even I find excessively negative, and A. R. Morlan's "Fast Glaciers" only saves itself from the charge of idiot-plotting by making the specific idiocy of an otherwise intelligent person its principal theme.

But there's some interesting work, as the simple tale of how one or more people attempt (successfully or not) to save something allows for considerable variation. Suzy McKee Charnas's "Lis-



tening to Brahms" is much more about cultural contamination than the last decades of her rather uninteresting characters; Paul J. McAuley's more polished "The Rift" is about human interaction, with the endangered species strictly as background; Daniel Abraham's "Chimera 8" combines ideas about the moral responsibility of the creator with more obvious ones about the guilt of the destroyer; and William Shunn's "Dance of the Yellow-Breasted Luddites" is a contrived but effective puzzle-story.

Three stories spill over the most elastic limits of sf into fantasy. Brian Stableford's "Tenebrio" concerns the survival of a night-spirit, Michael Cadnum's "Bite the Hand" loftily ignores elementary biology, and the real star of the book replaces it with something else entirely. Ted Chiang's "Seventy-Two Letters" is a steampunk *tour de force*, in which the mistaken notions of 18th-century natural philosophy are combined brilliantly with 19th-century eugenic worries and Kabbalistic lore. My only objection to this excellent tale is that it ends rather abruptly. I think Chiang should work it into a novel, and perhaps he will – whichever, I look forward to seeing more from him.

Every now and then some boyfriend, alter ego, or hanger-on of a writer whom I've slated upbraids me in sad-eyed terms for not liking the book as much as he or she does. Thereat I shrug, but in the case of Nancy Kress's *Improbability Moon* (Tor, \$23.95) I get the impression that she likes it *less* than I do. It's a conventional tale of how a scientific expedition to an inhabited planet sets about getting to know the natives, who have unusual mental attributes. Stanley Weinbaum started it, Ursula Le Guin made her name with it, Brian Aldiss, Clifford Simak, Eric Frank Russell, Robert Sheckley and many others have had their say, but there's plenty of mileage left and Kress does it very well, with believable characters and the sort of coherent ornamentation that derives from a society visualized in depth. Intercut are scenes from aboard a Terran space-cruiser, involved in a desperate war with implacably hostile aliens (called Fallers) – and the war is getting uncomfortably close to the expedition.

Given competent writing – and Kress's is a great deal better than that – how could such a combination fail? Yet fail it does, and the failure creeps up on the reader. Wherever Kress directs her fine focus, the world and the people work brilliantly, but as soon as she turns to the context, the illusion collapses. For most obvious starters, the people of World (as they call it) are distinguishable from ourselves only by distribution of body hair, and presumably interfertile with us (it's not been



tried yet, but give 'em time). Moreover, their (always capitalized) World and ours are linked by a "Space Tunnel" thoughtfully provided by a now-vanished super-race, who presumably seeded World (and several others with minimally diverged inhabitants) with Cro-Magnon populations. Has anyone in the book the least curiosity why this was done? No! They're supposed to be scientists, but they accept it as a *donnée*.

Likewise, while there's a certain expressed disquiet that the Fallers should be bent on wiping out the human race, no one – ever – expresses the least interest in why they feel that way.

Regardless of subject matter, it might be said that every self-contained novel is akin to a small island, upon which we are stranded for a night, a week, a month... and who knows what alien beasts we will find thereon? But if that's true, we should probably stretch the simile and say that an anthology is like a town of houses, all of which we'd enjoy exploring for a while. Furthermore, presiding over every anthology is a town mayor, or maybe a crimeland don figure, there to ensure that the buildings are in order; that this is a town that can and should be proud of itself... A protector, but also a judge. And lording over two major conurbations this month is Peter Crowther – a man quite capable of putting on a fictional front.

First, *Taps and Sighs* (Subterranean Press, "deluxe hardcover edition," \$35), an American anthology of "original stories of hauntings". We thumb a ride into a town that seems to have been in hiding for a while – like the town of Willoughby, way back when in the old *Twilight Zone* series – and we find a good deal of that charming paradox: the familiar newly-told tale. How long has it been since we've had a book that came right out with it and said: here – are you listening? – *here there be ghosts*. The intention, I would gather, is for this recommended book to show new ways of performing old tricks; and the 250-plus pages are packed with insights and well-known names. I would venture that the first half of the book is stronger than the second, but I rarely walk in a straight line from one end of town to the other anyway. Michael Marshall Smith gives us "Charms," a gentle story of music helping to cure a leprous marriage. "The Glove" by Ken Wisman has a haunted baseball mitt, and the way that a father's disapproval of his son's path through life can cause more than bad feelings.

"The Insolence of Candles against the Light's Dying" by Chaz Brenchley would seem to be concerned with jealousy and regret; it is a good example of pathos in prose, of fair delineations of

"Deeply strange, and deeply dangerous," they conclude, which will do when you're fighting a war, not when you're writing a novel. In the same vein, there's a potent alien artefact which both sides want to control as a weapon, and which seems to have something to do with the Worlders' improbable social psychology. OK, but its potency in one direction (which depends on strong-force manipulation) has no bearing whatever on its effect in the other, about which Kress falls abruptly silent, just when the denouement is heralded. But then, she treats both plotlines much the same way: she brings each to an arbitrary and perfunctory conclusion and tacks on a sentimen-

tal epilogue, conspicuously ignoring innumerable loose ends and leaving the book a good 150 pages short. Were I her publisher, I'd have chucked the MS back at her with a demand that she finish it – or I think I would. What if she couldn't, and she'd blown her advance? Facial egg all round if the contract had to be written off.

I suppose this may just be Volume 1 of something (though that's not indicated on my proof copy), in which case I'll look forward to the conclusion; but on the evidence before me, Kress has come to dislike this book intensely, and for the life of me, I can't see why.

Chris Gilmore

## Tunes and Hidden Towns

David Mathew

self-deception. "What," asks one character, "you mean we make our own ghosts?" Ramsey Campbell hits another of the anthology's highs with "Return Journey," in which a train ride through a tunnel eats up not the train, but the time between the present and the principal lead's rotten thoughts about the past. Brian Stableford's "All you Inherit" looks at youthful pregnancy and, in a sense, the way that we can even be haunted by disease.

For me, the real surprise was not that *Taps and Sighs* has very few female inhabitants – only Poppy Z. Brite and a name new to me, that of Tracy Knight, who co-authors "Circling the Drain" with the editor. Nor that the book had a cosy, nostalgic feel. Nor even that no information about the contributors was provided (although I read a proof and the last point might be rectified when the town is discovered by as many people as I can possibly convince to go there). No. The one genuine surprise was "City of Dreams" – the best story I've ever read from Richard Christian Matheson, through which a maturity of approach, however temporary a show it might turn out to be, is abroad – or at the very least a

change in the angle of attack is currently present. In this story there is none of the "macheted-wood" prose that I've always felt spoiled the author's good ideas. My reservations about Matheson's work in the past were connected to his artistic presentation, rather than being doubts about *ability*. But this one, about a well-paid writer becoming more than interested in his aloof new neighbour is first-rate.

Peter Crowther, as I said above, has another place to lay his head this month.

The book is called *Foursight* (Gollancz, £16.99) – a collection of four novellas that were previously brought out singly. Of the first, Graham Joyce's "Leningrad Nights," many words have been printed, but I'd like to add briefly that it is a wonderful piece of work, about the destruction wrought by the Second World War on the eponymous city, and about the lengths to which a boy will go to survive. These lengths being, it must be said, considerably greater when one has in one's possession a dead relative, a dead relative's stash of opium and a God-fearing prostitute whose life must at all costs be saved. The only thing wrong with this piece, I'm afraid, is some terribly boss-eyed proofreading. With *Taps and Sighs* (a proof, as I say) the typos I tended to overlook, but that's not as easy with a finished product.

"How the Other Half Lives" is by James Lovegrove. William Ian North is one of life's winners; even his initials suggest as much. Fiscal impresario or ruthless entrepreneur, he commands a vast business network and his wealth is astonishing, his luck simply second to nobody's. Until now. Things are starting to go wrong. Chaperoned by his chauffeur he glides to work for another "merely magnificent Monday" but different eddies, for some reason, are in the air. A few million pounds are dead in the dust. What has happened? It has nothing to do with the fact that North is a snotrag; in fact, it might be that he has not been nasty enough. According to the deal he struck – not



with the devil but with the next best thing – he has been administering a daily savage beating to the poor bastard in the cellar, and keeping this clone-golem a stone's throw from death's door; in other words, North has kept his side of the bargain.

The other half lives in squalor, if the word "lives" is even accurate. Undernourished, in pain, his only comfort is in using the end of a spent match to doodle for the delectation of a regular visitor, a rat. Little does North know, but the prisoner's newly-found senses of enjoyment (and occasionally hope) are whittling away at the finer points of the supernatural contract. And once the rat starts bringing the clone-golem items that have been drawn, the *real* North's luck goes from bad to worse. It's all very clever; an engaging moral fable about power and responsibility, and the ability or inability to forgive.

Kim Newman gives us "Andy Warhol's Dracula" – the collection's standout and the second-best piece of fiction that I have read by the author. Newman has now shown the world his second authentic masterpiece (*The Quorum*, 1994, being his first). Unofficial preacher that he is, Kim Newman is the marriage-authorizer of high and low art. He knows as much about obscure Italian art films of the 1950s as he does about the steaming piss-bowls of punktown's crack houses in the 1970s. And the stink of the latter permeates this novella, in which Andy Warhol (whose real name, Andy Warhola, as the author points out, was eerily close to the anagram Wlad Dracula) leeches from the society in which one fed to love, and loved to feed. Having ransacked and raped what it regarded as the worst indulgences of progressive rock, punk music put a pistol in its mouth, or a needle in its arm, and fulfilled its early promise in a splash of red; and among other things, this novella reflects that.

Finally, what I really *liked* about "The Vaccinator" by Michael Marshall Smith was the principal character's job-description... as *not* seen on many CVs or discussed in many career-progression interviews. To wit: "You thrashed out the deal in a bar somewhere, over a few lines of coke. You negotiated for the bad guys to be paid a percentage of what they might have expected to get out of the kidnapping; in return, they didn't actually go through with it. Like a vaccine. Preventative maintenance." What's more, "The Vaccinator" has a good beginning and as clever an eye for business as the character's. To some extent you might even use that overworked critical nugget, "quintessential" – but this is part of the problem with "The Vaccinator": its nagging familiarity. Despite some shiny one-liners ("What's up with you guys? Masters of the universe and



you can't even keep your pets under control") which show that the author is in fine spirits – the story, in fact, being a jokey reworking of ideas from the *Men in Black* movie – I couldn't help feeling disappointed. It wasn't simply the proximity to the Newman story, or the off-the-peg Americanisms: it was more the sense I had that Smith is boxing at a weight that is lower than his own. "The Vaccinator" seemed too *easy*; it would have been nice to see the author really stretch, or to top-and-tail the lines into a cracking short story. It was good, but Smith has shown us much better work.

In 1998, a young man named Luke Sutherland published a debut novel called *Jelly Roll*, about a group of jazz musicians whose lives are altered, for the worse, by Ambition. As a muted



The best thing about rock 'n' roll's nice Jonathan Cohen  
The new book by (Deputy) David

combo they survive, but low hopes can bring their own price: and it is only when they decide to strengthen their professional footing that disaster joins the band... Subtextually, something similar runs through the arteries of Joel Lane's debut novel, **From Blue to Black** (Serpent's Tail, £10), but where the predecessor was written in a strong Scottish accent, Joel Lane exhibits the coolly poetic prose that we have come to expect (and admire) in his short stories: prose dense and slippery, and rigorously English, and never less than a joy to be embraced by.

*From Blue to Black* is a simple but affecting tale, and the musical genre under inspection is indie-rock, not jazz or punk – but of course some comparisons are inevitable, especially with punk. For punk rock was about iconoclasm – but it was also about the pain of transformation (don't laugh); about the ghoulish attention to nihilism, in which incompetence was unimportant. Lane's singer/guitarist Karl certainly goes through some fairly devastating life-changes during the course of the book – after the early sections, some of which are jokey and sarcastic; some good handfuls of pepper are thrown into the faces of some of rock's popinjays... The early 1990s, and Karl heads a band called Triangle. Our narrator, David, joins up as a bass player and the two embark on a passionate relationship; the book is written in the first person from David's point of view, and his narration is self-abrasive. There is a terrible lachrymosity to the entwined facts that (a) he would like to keep his lover in check (for either person's sake, or for both); and that (b) he fails to do so. Karl, David believes at first, is an enigmatic soul; in fact, yes, he's as enigmatic as a judge, as a newt – he's a drunkard. But although alcoholism, and later drug addiction, form part of Karl's mental downfall; there is something sinister in his past, we suspect – something worse than the fact that he used to be beaten up by a gang whose principal bully was also gay and used to have sex with Karl... What was it that Borges said in conversation with Norman Thomas di Giovanni (*Borges on Writing*, 1973): "People are fond of me in spite of my stories, I should say." Well, people are fond of Karl despite *his* stories (in the sense of fabrications); it is clear, by the end of the first chapter, with the first gay fuck having come and gone, that Karl has secrets, and plenty of them. He announces that he has a daughter.

David comes across as sweet, good-natured, but so easily hurt (by Karl's incessant sexual catch-as-catch-cans) that his naiveté reads sometimes as dim-wittedness. Embroiled as he is in a love affair with a naked flame, he is too close to a situation in which he is fine fuel to use up by Karl. As readers, we

are one brain short of the affair, and it might not be a high watermark of originality for Lane to have composed his novel in this fashion, but

it is definitely effective. We see and understand the more rational half of the relationship; and the only option is to gawp at Karl as David does, trying

to decode, to smithereen.

Serpent's Tail, furthermore, have packaged this novel beautifully.

David Mathew

The first few volumes of Gollancz/Millennium's exemplary Fantasy Masterworks series are a timely reminder that there is more than one lineage in fantasy. Critics long ago grew tired of reiterating the point that Tolkien and his numerous acolytes do not constitute the only tradition by which fantasy should be measured, that other, fundamentally more interesting, potentials exist and have been explored by 20th-century fantasists in original and resonant ways. The compilers of the Masterworks seem to have operated with this stricture in mind: so far on their list, there isn't a Tolkienoid or a Tolkienism in sight. Nor is there any in prospect.

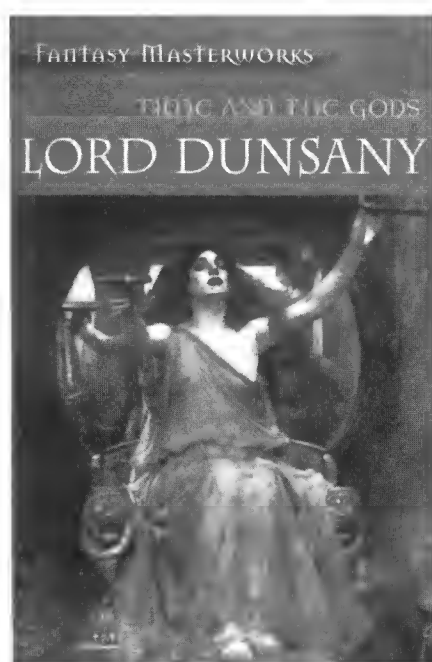
The basic distinction between Tolkien's legacy and the other, less familiar one is a matter of emphasis, and thus also of style. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and their followers are moral fantasists, concerned at root with the struggle of good and evil: they are didactic or homiletic, prone to allegory and thus (arguably) to condescension toward their readers; stylistically, they (again arguably) have a tendency to lull, to employ anodyne rhythms. This famously infuriated Michael Moorcock, as he made plain in his 1980s essays like "Epic Pooh." Surely a more robust use can be made of the fantastic, in a spirit of vigour and rigour? This has been done, repeatedly, by what might be termed the ironic fantasists, authors uninterested in, or unconvinced by, simple moral polarities. They are sardonic satirists and parodists, idiosyncratic to the point of uniqueness, ironic commentators on human and divine folly. They tend to be original stylists, possessors of copious erudition, which they express with humorous eccentricity. Their works are bizarrely fascinating, even if their taste for whimsy is unconstrained by the requirements of allegory, and so prone to be excessive. They are originals, such as Mervyn Peake, Avram Davidson, Fritz Leiber, China Miéville, and, the foci of the present discussion, Lord Dunsany, Jack Vance and E. R. Eddison. They are the Other, and perhaps the Greater, fantasists.

Lord Dunsany was, very possibly, the founder of modern fantasy, the first writer to construct imaginary secondary worlds as a matter of course. This he first did in a stream of short stories, most of them published in a succession of six slim collections between 1905 and 1916; and, with admirable bold generosity, the full contents of these volumes are assembled in *Time and the Gods* (Millennium, £6.99). Probably best not read all at

once, these more than 80 tales, most quite short, are wayward and ironic in the extreme. Dunsany was an authentic Baron in the Irish peerage, and did in life what Edwardian aristocrats were prone to do: hunt, travel, socialize, indulge odd scholarly obsessions, publish his own work when regular publishers wouldn't touch it. But his pursuits informed a real literary talent; and in time he became recognized as a significant writer, noted for his plays and novels, and, somewhat in retrospect, for his superb short fantasies. His knowledge of the Bible and of classical writers shaped his poetic, rhythmic, knowingly verbose prose style; and his aristocratic background provided him with a viewpoint of leisurely detachment, of lordly whimsy.

## Irony and Whimsy

Nick Gevers



Hashish may conceivably have contributed too. But the product was an exoticism both profound and hilarious, a sequel to the decadent imaginativeness of the 1890s and a profound inspiration for later pulp Gothicists like Lovecraft.

Initially, Dunsany set out to codify his own mythology, which he did in grand manner in *The Gods of Pegana* (1905), describing an imaginary pantheon of gods and their interactions and pronouncements. In this he was a clear precursor of Tolkien, a sort of scholarly fabricator. But these deities faded into the background quite quickly; Dunsany invented new settings and protagonists as he found convenient, mixing real and contrived geographies with complete freedom. Thus, entities with odd names and powers are quite easily encountered walking the streets of Dunsany's London, while his narrators can readily dream or drug themselves into the domain of the marvellous. And the stories' tone is likewise liberally various: some are parables about gods and their prophets; others are accounts of heroic quests, with titles like "The Fortress Unvanquishable, Save For Sacnoth" and "The Sword of Welleran"; some are travelogues of strange lands, like the remarkable "Idle Days on the Yann"; yet others are narratives of magical crimes and ignominious failures; some verge on social significance, commenting on the foibles of Dunsany's less favoured contemporaries. Logic is sometimes set at naught; peculiar names and coinages abound; grand climaxes and artful anticlimaxes mingle. As one of Dunsany's own titles proclaims, here is an authentic Book of Wonder.

But Dunsany also deserves credit for his achievement as a humorous writer. His exoticism is proverbial, but less so his wit, which in fact pervades this collection. As an ironist, Dunsany knew better than to take his own creations too seriously; consequently, the ridiculous is never absent from his tales. The gods of Pegana are caricatures of pagan deities, prone to petty quarrels with mortals and the forces of nature. They are highly fallible, losing territory and belongings to sundry challengers, including demons who steal the secret of the gods, and eventually earn the worship of troops of baboons. The fearsome monsters Dunsany's heroes fight are all too often farcical creatures like metal dragons or a Gladsome Beast. In one tale, a city must be saved from invasion by the ghosts of long-dead heroes, because – why else? – there are no heroes presently forthcoming. In "A Story of Land and Sea" a great pirate captain escapes pursuing navies by tak-

ing his ship on to the land; soon his cannon are mowing down camel-borne cavalymen in the middle of the Sahara Desert. Incongruity brilliantly controls narrative form itself when some later stories wilfully forsake any closure at all. For its wonderful mix of invention and irony, provided in such plentiful quantity, *Time and the Gods* deserves the label of one of the most significant fantasy collections ever compiled.

At the same time, two reservations have to be expressed. One relates to the paradoxical decision of the book's editor to place *The Gods of Pegana* at the end of the volume, thus disrupting the proper order of reading. And an opportunity has been missed to produce a truly definitive omnibus of Dunsany's short fantasies, as several notable stories published a little after 1916 have been omitted, including two sequels to "Idle Days on the Yann." A line was drawn too early. But no such criticism can be levelled at another Fantasy Masterworks compilation, Jack Vance's *Tales of the Dying Earth* (Millennium, £7.99), a genuinely complete assemblage, which carries Dunsany's techniques to even higher levels.

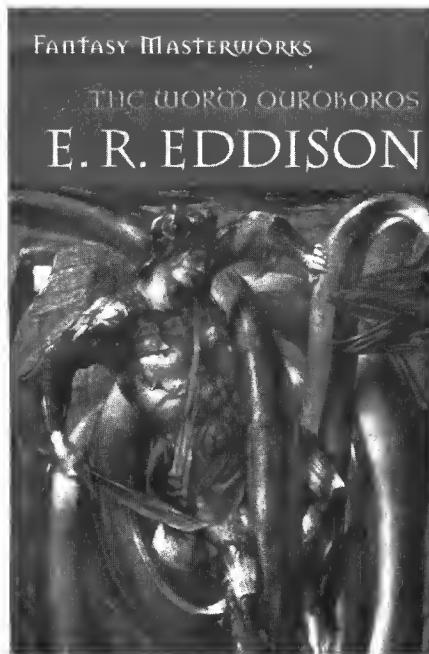
*Tales* consists of four story cycles, *The Dying Earth* (1950), *The Eyes of the Overworld* (1966), *Cugel's Saga* (1983), and *Rhialto the Marvellous* (1984), which together constitute one of the great masterpieces of ironic fantasy. Emulating Clark Ashton Smith, Vance chose as his setting the decadent end of all things, the Earth of two billion years hence, which lies beneath a moribund Sun, terminally exhausted by the ravages of time. In these circumstances, earnest endeavour is futile by definition; although the first book contains a few examples of individuals desperately striving for some quest to give conventional meaning to their lives. The best formula for survival and happiness on the Dying Earth is a mixture of cynicism, scheming predatoriness, and the ability to function as a contemplative connoisseur meditating on the beauty of the ruins. Ironic exoticism can only flourish here.

And it does. Vance's characters are sly confidence men, opportunistic adventurers, and sharp-tongued and devious magicians, who, trading high rhetoric and exquisitely crafted low insult with everyone they encounter, go eagerly about the business of self-aggrandizement in their haunted, desolate environment. In *The Dying Earth*, every romantic hero – Turjan of Miir, or Guyal of Sferé – has a picaresque counterpart, a Mazirian the Magician or a Liane the Wayfarer. And by the time of *The Eyes of the Overworld*, a brigand is the only conceivable protagonist. Cugel the Clever



wanders the landscape, engaging in one deftly plotted escapade after another; and Rhialto the Marvellous, a member of a fractious coterie of egotistical wizards, ultimately exceeds Cugel, carrying wit and mayhem across thousands of centuries and millions of light years. The verbal dexterity of these stories manifests itself in brilliant epigrams, baroque painterly vistas, and wonderful invented names, all in profligately copious quantity; *Tales of the Dying Earth* is a fine showcase of fantasy at its most polished, a volume that if anything upstages *Time and the Gods*.

That ironic fantasy can succeed at epic length as much as in the form of short stories is borne out by another Masterworks entry, *The Worm Ouroboros* (Millennium, £6.99) by E.



R. Eddison, first published in 1922. A creative loner like Dunsany and Vance, Eddison was an enthusiast of Norse myth and of classical philosophy, the latter in grand histrionic doses. A stylist as determined as any, Eddison wrote in a splendidly outlandish blend of formal modern diction and Elizabethan or Jacobean English, replete with flamboyant archaisms and fanciful apostrophes. But no matter how extravagant *The Worm* may be, it is immensely accessible compared with Eddison's later (and vaguely connected) Zimiamvian Trilogy, and for sheer excitement stands as one of the great adventure stories in the fantastic canon.

Oddly for a novel set in the savage never-never land of – of all places – the planet Mercury, *The Worm* begins on Earth, where a leisured grandiloquent scholarly sort of fellow, Lessingham, perhaps Eddison's idealized fictional counterpart, exchanges cryptic dialogue with his lover and a martlet before travelling to Mercury in astral wise, there to witness the sort of heroic warfare not available on this mundane world. Peculiarly Earthlike, this Mercury is inhabited by mighty warriors and fearsome warlocks, the virtuous sort known eccentrically as Demons and their evil adversaries as Witches. The Demons and the Witches wage a sort of world war, one packed with grandiose challenges, cloak-and-stiletto intrigues, ascents of Olympian peaks, desperate mêlées on land and sea, and spells attended with sulphurous smokes and even more sulphurous rhetoric. In the manner of a high masculine daydream, feats of arms and interludes of daft courtly dalliance intermingle in a breathless narrative torrent. And (to explain the novel's title) when they've won the war, the Demons beg a higher power to allow them to fight it all over again, a wish quite casually granted. Everyone, the reader included, has a hair-raisingly enjoyable time of it. *The Worm Ouroboros* is a magnificent study in the psychology of sheer whimsical self-indulgence, and as such – as a feast of self-satirical braggadocio – is an epic that interrogates all epics, even as it affirms them.

These opening Fantasy Masterworks, then, are well chosen, handsomely presented revivals of works that must be read in order that fantasy can properly be understood, understood as much more than a crass Tolkienian monoculture. The intelligence, the wit and the style of Dunsany, Vance and Eddison are infinitely enjoyable, and simple awareness of their example can only enrich the fantasy genre, which – surely – begs for such enrichment.

Nick Gevers

# BOOKS RECEIVED



MAY  
2000

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by *Interzone* during the month specified. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Anderson, Poul. **Tau Zero**. "Gollancz SF Collectors' Editions." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07099-4, 190pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1970; a well-remembered work of hard sf.) 18th May 2000.

Bear, Greg. **Darwin's Radio**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-651138-4, 440pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1999; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 14S; it's pure sf, but marketed for the mainstream Michael Crichton audience, rather than as part of HarperCollins's more generic Voyager list.) 15th May 2000.

Bear, Greg. **Rogue Planet**. "Star Wars." Del Rey/Lucas Books, ISBN 0-345-43538-9, 341pp, hardcover, \$26. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first edition; it seems Mr Bear will turn his hand to anything: he perpetrated a *Star Trek* spinoff many years ago, and now he has been seduced into the *Star Wars* universe, with a novel about the boyhood exploits of George Lucas's space-opera character Annakin Skywalker.) 2nd May 2000.

Benford, Gregory. **Eater**. HarperCollins/Eos, ISBN 0-380-97436-3, 340pp, hardcover, cover by Amy Halperin,

\$24. (Sf novel, first edition; a new hard-sf blockbuster by the well-known physicist author; a note on the publishing house: Avon Books, former publisher of the "Eos" sf/fantasy imprint, has now been taken over by HarperCollins USA.) 1st May 2000.

Borchardt, Alice. **Night of the Wolf**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648386-0, 502pp, A-format paperback, cover by Heather Kern, £6.99. (Historical horror/romantic novel, first published in the USA, 1999; follow-up to *The Silver Wolf*; the author is the sister of bestselling novelist Anne Rice.) 5th June 2000.

Brown, Eric. **New York Nights: Book One in the Virex Trilogy**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-57506-872-8, 261pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the author's first novel in hard covers [following several paperback originals], and the opener in a three-parter – set in America 40 years hence, and involving virtual reality.) 18th May 2000.

Bujold, Lois McMaster. **A Civil Campaign: A Miles Vorkosigan Adventure**. Earthlight, ISBN 0-7434-0829-2, 408pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1999; this is probably the 11th Vorkosigan book; the print is small, so it's a bigger novel than it seems at first glance.) May (?) 2000.

Bunch, Chris, and Allan Cole. **Sten**. "Over one million Sten books sold worldwide." Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-007-S, 310pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1982; first in a rather ancient four-book space-opera series, making its first-ever appearance in Britain; presumably, Bunch 'n' Cole's heroic-fantasy novels must have sole well in the UK in recent years, to justify this resurrection.) 1st June 2000.

## Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature

Introduction by David Langford



Edited by  
Andrew M. Butler, Edward James  
and Farah Mendlesohn

the science fiction foundation

Butler, Andrew M., Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, eds. **Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature**. Introduction by David Langford. "Foundation Studies in Science Fiction, 2." The Science Fiction Foundation [c/o 22 Addington Rd., Reading RG1 5PT], ISBN 0-903007-01-0, x+183pp, trade paperback, cover by Josh Kirby, £10. (Collection of critical essays on Pratchett's best-selling humorous fantasies; first edition; in addition to the three editors, who all have essays here, contributors include Cherith Baldry, John Clute [an expansion of a piece which first appeared in *Interzone*], Nickianne Moody and Andy Sawyer, among others; there is also a useful primary and secondary bibliography; in format, the book is similar to an issue of the journal *Foundation*, although thicker; recommended as probably the first substantial critical work on Pratchett.) May 2000.

Card, Orson Scott. **Earthfall: Volume Four of Homecoming**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-977-6, xiv+370pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Salwowski, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 98; it's straplined "First publication in the UK" on the front cover – but why the five-year gap, we wonder?) 15th June 2000.

Clarke, Arthur C., and Michael Kube-McDowell. **The Trigger**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224712-7, 550pp, hardcover, cover by Fred Gambino, £11.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1999; another "fake" Clarke novel [i.e. written principally by American writer McDowell], it's a near-future thriller on the hoary old theme of the man who possesses the ability to destroy all the world's weaponry – compare C. S. Forester's *The Peacemaker* [1934] and Bob Shaw's *Ground Zero Man* [1971], also known as *The Peace Machine*.) 5th June 2000.

Constantine, Storm. **Sea Dragon Heir**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-927-9, 343pp, A-format paperback, cover by Anne Sudworth, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1999; reviewed by Tom Arden in *Interzone* 153.) 1st June 2000.

Counihan, Elizabeth, Deirdre Counihan and Liz Williams, eds. **Fabulous Brighton: An Anthology**. Foreword by Simon Fanshawe. Shrew Press [14 Queens Park Rise, Brighton BN2 2ZF], ISBN 0-9538481-0-8, 110pp, small-press paperback, cover by Deirdre Counihan, £4.99. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; all-original stories by Nigel Brown, Elizabeth Counihan, Peter T. Garratt, Peter James, Lynne Truss, Liz Williams and others; see website at [www.fabulous-brighton.co.uk](http://www.fabulous-brighton.co.uk).) May 2000.

Crowley, John. **Little, Big**. "Fantasy Masterworks, S." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-711-X, 538pp, B-format paperback, cover by John Anster Fitzgerald, £6.99. (Fantasy



novel, first published in the USA, 1981; winner of the World Fantasy Award in 1982, this is one of the more recent masterpieces of English-language fantasy literature – a wonderful book, and shamefully too long out of print in this country.) 18th May 2000.

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. **The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Thirtieth Annual Collection.** St Martin's Griffin, ISBN 0-312-26416-X, cxxvi+S14pp, trade paperback, cover by Thomas Canty, \$17.95. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; there will be a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at \$29.95; as usual, the prefatory material is massive in extent, with detailed year's summations by the two editors, a media summation by Edward Bryant, a comics round-up, obituaries, etc; the body of the anthology contains reprint stories and poems, all first published in 1999, by Eleanor Arnason, Susanna Clarke, Peter Crowther, Charles de Lint, Elizabeth Engstrom, Jeffrey Ford, Neil Gaiman [twice], Tim Lebbon, Ursula Le Guin, Kelly Link, Paul J. McAuley ["Naming the Dead," from *Interzone*], Patricia A. McKillip, Ian R. MacLeod, Steven Millhauser, Kim Newman, James Sallis, Delia Sherman, Michael Marshall Smith [twice], Steve Rasnic Tem [twice], Douglas E. Winter [represented by an interesting essay on horror, "The Pathos of Genre"], Gene Wolfe, the inevitable Jane Yolen, and many others; another impressive line-up, if slightly less rich in Big Literary Names than last year's volume.) August 2000.

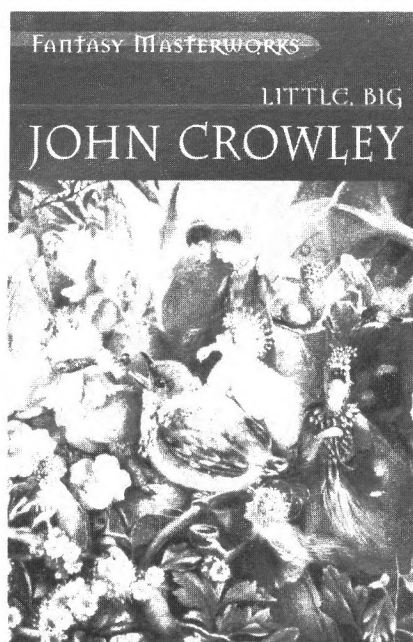
Davenport, Roger. **Lowlake.** "Point Horror Unleashed." Scholastic, ISBN 0-439-99490-X, 190pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Young-adult horror novel, first edition.) 16th June 2000.

Delany, Samuel R. **The Jewels of Apor.** "Gollancz SF Collectors' Editions." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07100-1, 221pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1962; this is the revised text of 1967; Delany's debut novel, written when he was only 19 – flamboyant juvenilia.) 18th May 2000.

De Lint, Charles. **Forests of the Heart.** "His spellbinding new novel of magic in two worlds." Tor, ISBN 0-312-86519-8, 397pp, hardcover, cover by John Jude Palencar, \$25.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; another tome in Canadian author de Lint's characteristic "urban fantasy" vein.) 3rd June 2000.

Dick, Philip K. **Minority Report: The Collected Short Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume Four.** Introduction by James Tiptree, Jr. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-947-3, x+380pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA as *The Little Black Box*, 1987; the title has been changed to *Minority Report* because that's also the title of a prospective Steven Spielberg film, based on the Dick short story of

August 2000



the same name included here, which is "due to star Tom Cruise.") 18th May 2000.

Dick, Philip K. **We Can Remember It For You Wholesale: The Collected Short Stories of Philip K. Dick, Volume Five.** Introduction by Thomas M. Disch. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-948-1, xi+39Spp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1987; it's a tribute to the late great Phil Dick's durability that this exhaustive posthumous five-part gathering of his stories, mainly from the 1950s and 1960s, is being issued yet again; the volumes were edited and annotated by Paul Williams, although he has no title-page credit.) 18th May 2000.

Di Filippo, Paul. **Joe's Liver.** Cambrian Publications [distributed in the UK by BBR, PO Box 625, Sheffield S1 3GY], ISBN 1-878914-11-1, 313pp, hardcover, cover by Arturo Sinclair, £25 post paid in the UK. (Humorous novel by a well-known American sf/fantasy writer, first edition; a small-press item, it has a limited run of 300 signed copies; we have already listed this book here three months ago, but are repeating it because we have been sent a second review copy by BBR, announcing British availability; for further information, see [www.bbr-online.com](http://www.bbr-online.com).) No date shown: received in May 2000.

Doyle, Debra, and James D. Macdonald. **Requiem for Boone.** "Gene Roddenberry's *Earth: Final Conflict*." Tor, ISBN 0-312-87460-X, 253pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; proof copy received; third in a series by various hands, following volumes by Fred Saberhagen and the late James White.) May 2000.

Edwards, Graham. **Stone & Sea.** "Book Two of the Stone Trilogy." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-651071-X, 440pp, A-format paperback,

cover by Les Edwards, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; Edwards's fifth novel, following the trilogy *Dragoncharm* (1995), *Dragonstorm* (1996) and *Dragonflame* [1997], and the predecessor volume to this one, *Stone & Sky* [1999].) 15 May 2000.

Erikson, Steven. **Deadhouse Gates: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen.** Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04621-8, xvii+684pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Stone, £10.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; second of a promised ten-volume sequence.) 7th September 2000.

Fulton, Roger. **Encyclopedia of TV Science Fiction.** "New edition. Additional material by John Betancourt." Boxtree/TV Times, ISBN 0-7522-7167-9, ix+836pp, C-format paperback, £18.99. (Reference guide to sf/fantasy television programmes, first published in 1990; this is the fourth edition; the second edition appeared in 1995, and the third in 1997; this new version is over 100 pages longer than the last, and obviously much new material has been added, some of it by American contributor John Betancourt; however, in order to make space, the section on animated TV shows has been dropped; as we remarked of the last edition in 1997, "for better or for worse, we are living through the Golden Age of TV sf, and this impressively researched tome has established itself as the bible of the field; it gives full details of most sf plays, made-for-TV movies, serials and series shown on British television since the early 1950s; it's alphabetically arranged by title, and illustrated with eight pages of photographs; recommended"; the "shown on British TV" emphasis has now been amended, and this new version seems to take a more international approach; apparently, a specially-tailored American edition appeared in 1998 under the title *Sci-Fi Channel Encyclopedia of TV Science Fiction*, and that's when Betancourt joined the project; alas, much of the new material deals with fantasy – *Xena*, *Buffy*, etc, etc – rather than sf, so the volume has lost its original purity of purpose, but it remains a valuable reference resource.) 9th June 2000.

Gentle, Mary. **Ash: A Secret History.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06900-7, 1113pp, hardcover, cover by John Howe, £20. (Fantasy novel, first edition; we listed a rather odd proof copy of the first half a couple of months ago, where it was forecast as "the single largest fantasy work ever... 450,000 words in one volume... 1120 pages"; at last – it exists!; delayed from its original publication date of 1998, and further delayed from its declared 2000 publication date of April, here it finally is – Mary Gentle's magnum opus.) 15th June 2000.

Green, Simon R. **Fear and Loathing in Haven.** "Hawk & Fisher, 2." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-939-2, 646pp, A-format







paperback, cover by Jon Sullivan, £6.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition; the three constituent novels, *Vengeance for a Lonely Man*, *Guard Against Dishonour* and *Two Kings in Haven*, were first published in the USA [by Ace Books], 1991-1992.) 18th May 2000.

Harrison, M. John. **Travel Arrangements: Short Stories.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-57506-832-9, 262pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf-fantasy-mainstream collection, first edition; Harrison's first new collection since *The Ice Monkey* [1983], it contains 14 stories reprinted from sources as disparate as the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Women's Journal* and *Interzone* – from the last-named magazine come two stories, "Anima" [1992] and "The East" [1999]; recommended.) 25th May 2000.

Holt, Tom. **Snow White and the Seven Samurai.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-988-1, 308pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Cemmick, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1999; according to the blurb, "computers and fairy tales collide to hilarious effect in [this] latest sparkling cocktail of mayhem, wit and wonder.") 1st June 2000.

Holt, Tom. **Valahalla.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-983-0, 277pp, hardcover, cover by Paul Cemmick, £15.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; according to the blurb, it's set in "Odin's [one-time] bijou little residence known as Valhalla... But Valhalla has changed... Just like any corporation, the Valhalla group has had to adapt to survive.") 1st June 2000.

Hughes, David. **The Complete Kubrick.** Foreword by Peter Bogdanovich. Virgin, ISBN 0-7535-0452-9, xii+303pp, C-format paperback, £15.99. (Guide to the films, several of them sf, and to the film-making career of the late director, Stanley Kubrick; first edition; illustrated with two eight-page sections of colour photographs; the author is a British journalist.) 6th June 2000.

Jacoby, Kate. **Voice of the Demon: Second Book of Elita.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-926-0, 478pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Sullivan, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1999; reviewed by Tom Arden in *Interzone* 146.) 18th May 2000.

Leith, Valery. **The Company of Glass: Everien, Book One.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-857-4, x+397pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1999; "Valery Leith" is a pseudonym of the Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning, American-born but British-resident, sf writer Tricia Sullivan.) 18th May 2000.

McCarthy, Wil. **Bloom.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-856-6, 310pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (Sf novel, first

published in the USA, 1998; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 138.) 18th May 2000.

McMullen, Sean. **The Miocene Arrow.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87054-X, 416pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a big new book from one of the best Australian sf writers.) August 2000.

Maynard, L. H., and M. P. N. Sims. **Echoes of Darkness: Supernatural Tales.** Illustrated by Iain Maynard. Sarob Press ["Brynderwen," 41 Forest View, Mountain Ash, Wales CF45 3DU], ISBN 1-902309-09-X, ix+178pp, hardcover, cover by Iain Maynard, no price shown [probably £20]. (Horror collection, first edition; the authors, Len Maynard [born 1953] and Mick Sims [born 1952], endeavour to write in the spooky tradition of such British authors as M. R. James, E. F. Benson, A. N. L. Munby and L. T. C. Rolt – whence, no doubt, the imitative jangle of initials in their bylines; this is their second collection, following *Shadows at Midnight* [Sarob Press, 1999]; as with the first volume, several of the stories first appeared in small-press magazines.) No date shown: received in May 2000.

Moorcock, Michael. **King of the City.** Simon & Schuster/Scribner, ISBN 0-684-86143-7, 421pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Mainstream novel by the well-known sf/fantasy writer; first edition; Moorcock's most substantial new work in some years, it's billed as a sequel to *Mother London* [1988]; the publishers, straining for an effective tag line, describe it in their publicity blurb as "Dickens meets Irvine Welsh meets a rotweiler"; the actual jacket-flap blurb is a bit more restrained: "not since Dickens and Wells have England and its capital been so vividly brought to life in print.") 8th May 2000.

Morrow, James. **This is the Way the World Ends.** "Gollancz SF Collectors' Editions." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07101-X, 319pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986; a notable satire on the theme of nuclear doom.) 18th May 2000.

Newman, Kim. **Dracula Cha Cha Cha: Anno Dracula 1959.** Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-684-85183-0, 291pp, hardcover, cover by Ian Miller, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA as *Anno Dracula 1959*, 1998; third in the "Anno Dracula" sequence; why it has taken nearly two years [since its American publication, by Carroll & Graf] to appear in its author's home country remains a mystery.) 8th May 2000.

Pratchett, Terry. **Faust/Eric.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-954-6, 155pp, A-format paperback, cover by Josh Kirby, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novella, first published in 1990; the first word of the title is crossed out; a minor pendant to Pratchett's "Disc-

world" series, here repackaged to look more like a full-length novel.) 11th May 2000.

Pratchett, Terry, Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen. **The Science of Discworld.** Ebury Press, ISBN 0-09-187477-7, 368pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Kidby, £6.99. (Popular science text, based on the "Discworld" series of fantasies by Pratchett; first published in 1999; the book is embedded in a humorous fictional frame written by Pratchett, but the bulk of the chapters consist of fairly lightly-handled mathematical and scientific exposition, presumably by the well-qualified Messrs Stewart and Cohen; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 148.) May 2000.

Reed, Robert. **Marrow.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86801-4, 351pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it appears to be expanded from a story which first appeared in *Science Fiction Age*, July 1997, and is described by the publishers as "a breakthrough novel of enormous scope by the Hugo and Nebula Award-nominated author.") May 2000.

Rees, Celia. **The Cunning Man.** Scholastic Press, ISBN 0-439-01186-8, 186pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Young-adult horror novel, first edition; it has a salty, sea-mystery flavour.) 16th June 2000.

Reichert, Mickey Zucker, and Jennifer Wingert. **Spirit Fox.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-925-2, 386pp, A-format paperback, cover by Gordon Crabb, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998.) 18th May 2000.

Roberts, Adam. **Science Fiction.** "The New Critical Idiom." Routledge, ISBN 0-415-19205-6, ix+204pp, B-format paperback, £8.99. (Critique of sf, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; presumably the "New Critical Idiom" replaces the old "Critical Idiom" series of short books published by Methuen 20 or 30 years ago [and a useful little series that was too]; the author is "Lecturer in English at Royal Holloway, University of London," and "his sf novel *Salt* [2000] has been published by Orion"; he seems to be a colleague and friend of Roger Luckhurst, who wrote the Liverpool University Press book on J. G. Ballard a couple of years ago; this looks to be another intelligent, if rather brief, assessment of sf from an academic viewpoint – perhaps the first such general work on the genre since Edward James's *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* [Oxford University Press, 1994]; recommended.) 18th May 2000.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. **A Short, Sharp Shock.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-651078-7, 180pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Warner, £5.99. (Sf novella, first published in the USA, 1990; this has already appeared in

Britain as part of the collection *Dawn and Out in the Year 2000* [1992].) 5th June 2000.

Russell, Ken. **Mike and Gaby's Space Gospel: A Novel.** Warner, ISBN 0-7515-3015-8, viii+207pp, B-format paperback, cover by Bill Gregory, £6.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in 1999; yes, this is a book by the famous bad-taste film director Ken Russell – his debut novel, in fact; we didn't see last year's hardcover edition, but it doesn't seem to have set the world alight; a quote from the *Daily Mirror* describes it as "a sort of *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*... with more swearing"; unfortunately, it seems to be fairly limp stuff; a good deal of "mainstreamer sf" is stitched together from bits of hand-me-down Wells, Huxley and Orwell; Russell's effort, perhaps not surprisingly, seems to be made up of bits of old movies and TV shows – the mechanical aliens are first introduced with the sentence: "Well, if you can call to mind the robots of *Star Wars* then you have a pretty good idea.") 1st June 2000.

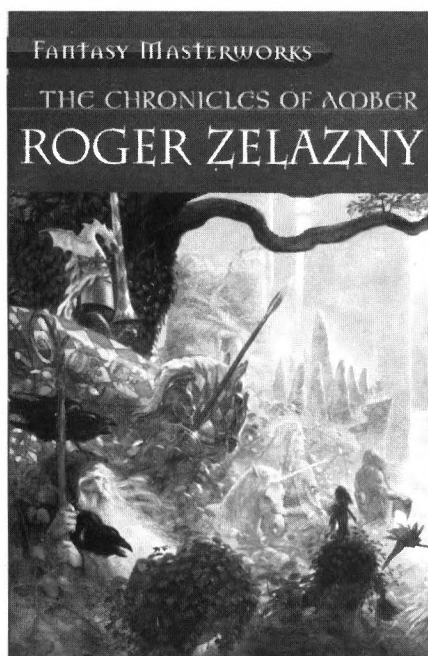
Shaw, Bob. **Orbitsville.** "Gollancz 5F Collectors' Editions." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07098-6, 187pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1975; one of the late Bob Shaw's best – set on a vast Dyson Sphere-type world.) 18th May 2000.

Siegel, Jan. **Prospero's Children.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-43901-5, xviii+350pp, hardcover, cover by the Tom Kidd, \$24. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1999; reviewed by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 152; as with the British edition, it's presented as the work of a new writer, but we hear tell that the pseudonymous author is Amanda Hemingway [born 1955], who wrote the sf novel *Pzyche* [1982].) 2nd May 2000.

Tepper, Sheri S. **Singer from the Sea.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06905-8, 426pp, C-format paperback, cover by Adrian Chesterman, £9.99. (Sf novel; first published in the USA, 1999; it's in the author's favoured planetary-romance mode – a mode that she uses more effectively than just about anyone else now writing; reviewed by Tom Arden in *Interzone* 148.) 18th May 2000.

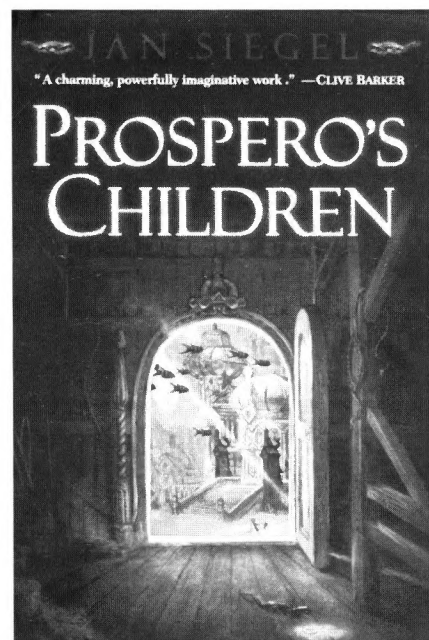
Westfahl, Gary, ed. **Science Fiction, Children's Literature, and Popular Culture: Coming of Age in Fantasyland.** "Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Number 88." Greenwood Press, ISBN 0-313-30847-0, xiv+157pp, hardcover, £40.95. (Collection of essays on sf, children's fiction and the popular media; first published in the USA, 2000; this is the American first edition, distributed in the UK by Eurospan, 3 Henrietta St., London WC2E 8LU; it contains 11 essays by the energetic Gary Westfahl, only one of which, "Mystery of the Amateur Detectives: The Early Days of the Hardy Boys," has been

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published before [it appeared, in different form, in *Millian* no. 14, Mar.-Jun. 1993]; other topics covered include the *Superman* comic, boys' series books, *This Island Earth* [both the novel by Raymond F. Jones, and the film version], *Star Trek*, pop videos, Hollywood novels, Isaac Asimov's attitude to "new information technologies," and the various adaptations and misinterpretations of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*; sprightly, jolly, continually stimulating, this volume is highly recommended.) May 2000.

Wooding, Chris. **Endgame.** Scholastic Press, ISBN 0-439-99533-7, 159pp, B-format paperback, £4.99. (Young-adult sf novel, first edition; it deals with the near-future threat of nuclear war.) 19th May 2000.



Yolen, Jane. **Sister Emily's Lightship and Other Stories.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87378-6, 300pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy collection, first edition; proof copy received; about two dozen of Yolen's adult stories, many of them reprinted from original anthologies edited by Datlow & Windling, Martin H. Greenberg, Patrick Neilsen Hayden and others; three of the stories are original to this book; the title piece, "Sister Emily's Lightship," won a Nebula Award in 1998.) July 2000.

Zelazny, Roger. **The Chronicles of Amber.** "Fantasy Masterworks, 6." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-726-8, 772pp, B-format paperback, cover by John Howe, £8.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition in this format [?]; the five novels it contains – *Nine Princes in Amber*, *The Guns of Avalon*, *Sign of the Unicorn*, *The Hand of Oberon* and *The Courts of Chaos* – were first published separately in the USA, 1970-1978; by an author who died in 1995, a once-popular but fast-fading series of yesteryear – maybe it will find a whole new readership with this reissue.) 15th June 2000.

### "One That Got Away"

Verne, Jules. **The Eternal Adam and Other Stories.** Edited by Peter Costello. "Phoenix Short Stories." Orion/Phoenix, ISBN 0-75380-870-6, viii+248pp, B-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £4.99. (Sf/fantasy/mainstream collection, first edition in this form; it contains an autobiographical essay ["Recollections of Childhood and Youth"] and eleven stories by Verne, translated from the French by various hands and here chronologically arranged; the first couple of stories are mundane adventures, but the majority are fantasy [e.g. "Master Zacharius"] or sf [e.g. "In the Twenty-Ninth Century"]; the volume is especially notable for the title story, "The Eternal Adam" itself, which is the most far-futuristic and imaginative of all Verne's shorter stories [even if, as we now know, it was heavily rewritten by his son, Michel Verne, from Jules's manuscript original entitled "Edom"]; this book is, in effect, a revised and expanded version of the posthumous Verne collection *Hier et demain* [1910], originally translated [in part] by I. O. Evans and published in abridged form by Arco Publications as *Yesterday and Tomorrow* [1965]; there never was a British paperback edition of that Arco collection [although one came out from Ace Books in the USA in the late 1960s], so this is a welcome, and long-overdue, volume; alas, Orion seem to have published it "invisibly," sending out no review copies, and we only learned of its existence six months after publication; recommended as an historically-important collection, particularly for its title story.) Late entry: November 1999 publication, not actually received for review but purchased by us in May 2000.



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